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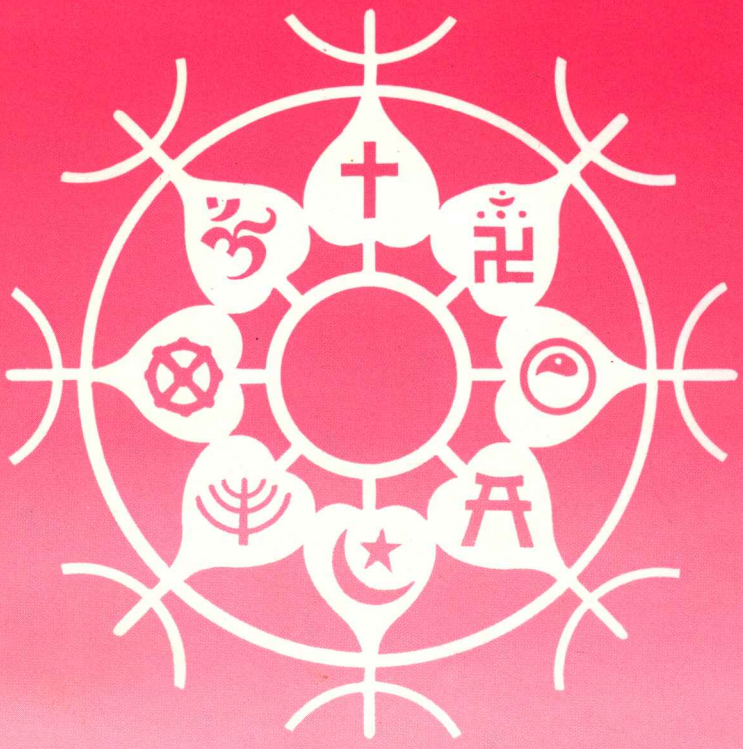

HINDUTVA:
CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS RESPONSE

January-March 2004 Vol. XXIX, No. 1

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Editorial

HINDUTVA: CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS RESPONSE

Religion is an existential entity emerging from the coming together of people with the intention of realizing their deepest yearning for a communion among themselves culminating in a communion with the Transcendental Reality; it results from their continued attempt to establish a holistic communion among nature, human beings and the Supernatural. This seems to require a perspective different from that which they normally cultivate in dealing with the natural course of events. This has been a constant phenomenon from the inception of humanity, and, in the course time, has become a vital element in the transformation of human psyche as well. The yearning for a lasting communion – natural (human) as well as supernatural – is so deep to human beings so much so that the internal dynamics and the external forms of religion that have evolved over the ages exercise a great emotional appeal among the adherents of any religion. Since religion is so natural to the human society, it must be admitted that this emotional aspect of religion has been a positive and creative force in vitalising and renewing the human spirit in different civilisations and political identities, and instrumental in bringing forth lasting and effective transformation in human society. We shall not ignore, at the same time, the fact that the same force has played havoc in setting persons, families, communities, cultures and civilisations against each other, orientating the human spirit diametrically against its deepest need for communion among human beings. Both these trends can be traced at every stage of the development of cultures and, thus, in the history of humanity.

The crucial question, however, is: having had an understanding of both the positive and negative forces that religions and religious adherents can effect in the life of individuals and societies, why should we still in the 21st century let our deepest emotions of religion being tampered and manipulated by the vested interests, and, thus, to perpetuate their own divisive designs? Instead of effecting unity and communion, they become

the instruments of division and antagonism, antipathy and hostility, setting people against people, especially among those adhering to different creedal forms. This tendency of perpetuating division among the religious adherents, and exploiting the emotional sentiments based on religious affiliation for the sake of the vested interests is a phenomenon that could be seen among different peoples and cultures. What is common to all this is the fact that these vested interests mostly have some political designs as their hidden agendas at the helm of affairs, which otherwise cannot be realized with the natural developments in the corresponding political realms.

Although merely a political move in reality, it has cultural as well as religious repercussions the brunt of which is to be borne by the people at large. For, such a political manoeuvre strictly involves cultural as well as religious dimensions of individuals and societies, and, therefore, can adversely affect the fabric of cultural, political or religious societies. Although we may come across with the indifference or even antipathy of many to the traditional religious forms, in the East or in the West, in most of the present day nations, whether democratic or not, the religious affinities do play a role, at least indirectly. Knowing this well, and tapping it to their good, the politicians are bent on taking advantage of the same to the maximum: thus, we find them attending religious rituals even if those services do not mean anything religious to them, involving in the issues concerning the spiritual or moral life of the religious adherents, mostly assuming the garb of apparently supporting positively the causes of religions, etc. Although this is a worldwide phenomenon, taken for granted in the normal course of events, there lurks the danger of religious sentiments being manipulated by the politicians for their advantage.

A concrete situation of this fact could be observed in the contemporary India, where almost all political parties, whether they claim to be secular or not, are taking advantage of the religious sentiments of the public at large. The age-old religious traditions still have a lasting influence on the mind of the Indian population, and this has paved the way for sustaining a vast arena of religious or devotional practices, and an effective following for various religions. Indian psyche, in general, can be said to be very much religious, and this is particularly true with the adherents of 'Hinduism' – if by this expression we temporarily concede to the technical definition endorsed by the Indian Constitution, or what is

accepted and propagated as Hinduism today by the advocates of the nationalist agenda – which is identified as the traditional religion of the people, still having the adherence of the 'majority' of Indians to its tenets. The historical developments in the Indian subcontinent over a long period of time have caused continued political suppression of the Indians either by the Muslim or Western (Christian) vanquishers. Although these conquerors enjoyed temporary political success in suppressing the indigenous governance either through the might of the sword or the strength of political manipulation, they have been equally detrimental in harassing the people and their native cultural and religious sentiments. It might be rightly said that the divergent cultural patterns of the conquerors and the conquered failed in mutually understanding and appreciating each other, causing a lasting wound on the mind of indigenous people, especially on their religious and cultural sensibilities. As any physical wound causes the organism to make its own empowerment by building up antibodies, and, thus, shielding itself from the external threats, the wounded psyche of the Indian society did try – though not always collectively – to protect itself by revitalising and reinvigorating its essential spirit. This, to my mind, is a positive development from the perspective of the sustenance and maintenance of any religiously oriented society.

This wounded psyche, however, having its emotional appeal at large, has turned out to be the most effective instrument of manipulation in the hands of many politicians, who are intent on yielding political power by employing the religious identity and sentiments of the so-called majority community in India. It is a fact that despite temporary setbacks, they keep on building up a promising political climate conducive to their designs, especially because the illiterate masses of the country – who are much more emotionally charged as far as religious issues are concerned – are unaware of their manipulative programmes at large. It is in this context the present number of *Journal of Dharma* addresses the issues related to Hindutva from its cultural as well as religious perspectives.

Hindutva, literally meaning the spirit or essence of Hinduism, has turned out to be an expression so often referred to and used not so much by the ardent practising Hindus, but by the politicians, in whose hands anything can be a manipulative strategy for yielding undeserving political power, especially when it can be of emotional appeal to the majority of the

vote bank. Hindutva as a nationalist movement, adversely affecting the pluralistic fabric of India, asserts against all historical backgrounds and the present-day social structures that India is one nation based on a *single* Hindu culture. Their ultimate aim is to establish a Hindu theocratic state in India, as if it is the natural and essential (or integral) fulfilment of the foundational world view of the 'majority' community, although they comfortably bypass the fact that this psyche is constituted by so many mutually supporting, but at times, mostly divergent streams of culture, thought, language and religion. It must also be said that it is an evident rejection and violation of the essential secular fabric of the Indian Constitution.

Those who are actively advocating a religious nationalism in the name of Hindutva are making an attempt to give shape to a *homogeneous* national unity purportedly based on the fundamental religious identity of the majority religious community. This, however, shall not be the final destiny of a state, as identifying the national identity and religious identity would have devastating consequences on the life of its citizens. For, the national and religious identities need not, may not, and (historically) did not always spontaneously converge on the same goal. Many a time, religious nationalism, being more sectarian than universal in appeal, tends to antagonise some segments of the nation – sometimes even those who subscribe to the same religious affinities and creedal forms – and fragment the nation and the society at large than truly becoming a leaven or catalyst of national unity and integrity as most of its political proponents purport it to be the case. A concerted effort is being made to force a sectarian identity as everybody's national identity; such a move involves the curtailment of the freedom of the people belonging to the minority religious or cultural groups, as the forced identity is only a 'foreign' identity as far as the latter groups are concerned. True nationalism shall never be an attempt to imprison anyone in any type of identity, but should be an instrument of freeing the citizens in order to become themselves, on their own. What is advocated is the need of a dynamic national unity and integrity that accommodate, accept and awaken the individual as well as community identities of various segments of the state through which the national identity can be promoted and achieved.

Only instilling a quest for transcendence among all constituent units can bring about the emergence of a true national identity in a pluralistic

society. The secularism that is advocated by the architects of the post-Independent India involves such a positive transcendence, and not a state that appeals in any way for an a-religious or agnostic existence. Secularism is not a denial of religion and religious sensibilities of people, but an affirmation of the most central and deep dynamics of human nature, with the possibility of opening up to others and accepting differences in the realization of one's humanity.

A new and artificial national consciousness is being forced upon a large section of Indian people by the so-called majority group at the expense of the unique consciousness of the minorities. This dynamics is being played and replayed in relegating the unique identities of the aboriginals of the country (technically, now identified as SC/ST/OBC) by classifying them as Hindus. Indeed, this has received a legal sanction from the architects of the Indian Constitution when they tried to offer the most wide, but 'negative' definition for the word 'Hindu'. The nationalist consciousness that is being publicised as the only valid and viable alternative for the unity and integrity of India, then, is turning out to be a denial of individual identities. I am not trying to advocate sectarianism, but only pointing to the need to identify, respect, and promote the unique consciousnesses and identities of certain linguistic, cultural or religious groups in such a way that they would become constructive elements in naturally evolving a healthy national consciousness. Thus, the attempt is not to advocate any type of antagonism against the nation as a whole, or any component unit of the nation. What is envisaged here expects that the national consciousness would nurture mutuality and respect among all major or minor component units or groups, and that these units would, in turn, enhance and promote the wider horizons and integral growth of a healthy national consciousness without in any way endangering either.

A secular society that calls for transcendence will not come about automatically. It is due to the natural and emotional bend or preference for oneself, for one's family, community or religion to which normally one belongs. However, in the light of a broader and healthier perspective, especially in the context of a pluralistic religio-cultural ethos, individuals and small or big group identities that these individuals form, must consciously strive to build up a secular society that can go beyond the narrow bounds of the other 'lower' affinities and commitments. Such a culture can emerge only if the members begin to respect each other, not

basing on the particular sectarian identities, but on the 'humanity' in which everyone partakes, and the inherent and unique relationship that emerges from it. The healthy constituents and contributors in this endeavour are, certainly, those cultural or religious identities that assist and promote individuals and groups at large to transcend their limiting boundaries – not by disrespecting or annihilating them – and, thus, to establish some sort of a trans-boundary existence among the citizens of a nation. They have to constantly remind themselves and reinforce the promising unity-building thought that "the bonds that unite us are stronger than the barriers that separate us," and try hard in all earnestness to establish a promising and life-enhancing communion of humanity, through which, I hope, there shall emerge the true national identity and integrity of India. In the words of S. Radhakrishnan, "it is a condition of consciousness in which feelings are fused, ideas melt into one another, boundaries are broken and ordinary distinctions transcended."[1]

It is with this hope scholars from a cross section of the Indian society address issues related to Hindutva, especially from a cultural and religious perspective. The first article by Albert Nambiaparambil, a pioneer in inter-religious dialogue in India, with about thirty years of experience in the field of actively promoting inter-religious relationships, is an attempt to articulate the causes, the repercussions and the positive directions that are to be put in perspective in order to understand the reality of a religion in relation to other religions. His foundation in the lived experience of a dialogic life makes his point truly a valid one. While making an earnest appeal to believers in different religions "to discover again and again, always anew, their own self-identity," he cautions us that "fanaticism of any kind, even in the cover of mistaken nationalist identity, is a danger to be confronted by the fellow-pilgrims."

Articulating the positive spirit of Hinduism and identifying it as true Hindutva, G. C. Nayak unravels the highest ideal of human and spiritual realization as conceived by the enlightened seers of the age-old Indian traditions. Trying to draw a balance between the ideal and reality, Nayak asserts that while "fanaticism and bigotry cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be regarded as virtuous," "tolerance is a necessary feature of

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[1] S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*, London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1988, 91.

Hindutva, understood in its proper perspective." He suggests that we should be aware of the need of "right directions" to keep the essence of Hinduism alive so that "this unique culture of transcendence does not lose itself in the mires of intolerance, superstitions, sectarian rigidities and hatred."

In "The Human as Religious and Secular: A Search into the Religious and Secular Ideologies of Our Time," V. F. Vineeth presents the tension between religious and secular dimensions in the societal life, and sheds light into the fact that Hindutva, as a social or political reality, is an attempt to manipulate and take undue advantage of this dichotomous situation in a highly religious oriented India. Although he calls for an understanding of the historical situation within which the Hindutva ideology has gained currency in India, basing on his analysis of the multi-faceted Indian society, he is categorical in saying that "*Hindutva* can never embrace the heart of India. It will be only a wishful desire of a few upper-caste Hindus cherishing the Brahmin superiority over all other people of India."

Identifying one of the reasons for the rise of Hindutva as a reaction, in his article "Academics Compounding Hindutva," M. Sivaramakrishna highlights the failure of the western and western influenced Indian scholars, mostly the academicians, to understand and appreciate the Hindu ethos in its true spirit. According to him, "they seem insensitive to the nuances of faith." Identifying some of such causes for the hardening stand of Hindutva at the national level, he calls for understanding among scholars when dealing with faith traditions, openness to differing cultural patterns, appreciation and positive approach to the religious experience of other peoples, etc. In the following article, Sanjyot D. Pai Vernekar examines the current concept of religion in the context of India, and holds that "religion has become responsible for all manner of undesirable developments taking place in the Indian subcontinent today." Drawing from the great lore of Modern Indian religious reformers and scholars, especially anchoring on the life vision of Sri Aurobindo, Vernekar concludes that "the openness and universal outlook that are its [i.e., Hinduism's] hallmarks shall be retained and positively cherished and cultivated for posterity."

V. T. Rajshekar, in his reflection "Hindutva: Whipping up Sleeping Slaves," argues for the cause of those segments of the society that are

adversely affected by the secular as well as religious manipulations of the apparently 'religious' forces. He confronts both the "Sacred Brahmins" and "Socialist Brahmins" in India who, according to him, are equally intent on manipulating the Dalit community for their political benefits. He contends that while the first adopts an explicit manipulative strategy in using religious affinity, the latter does the same in a tacit or implicit manner, and, thus, both amounting to be of the same category in perpetuating evil political strategies. Relying on the studies of B. R. Ambedkar, the author hopes that there will come a time "when Dalits will be whipped up from their current deep slumber, made to get angry and then fight to success."

In this issue we also have two special thematic literature surveys. The first is a critical analysis of Sita Ram Goel's book *Jesus Christ: An Artifice for Aggression* (1994). In this article Sebastian Athappilly argues in an uncompromising language that the attempt of Goel is one of manipulative scholarship, and holds that the attempted disproving the historicity of Jesus and painting Jesus as an instrument of aggression are resulting from certain hidden or unarticulated agendas such as "animosity against Christianity motivated by the manipulative designs of Hindutva *vadis*, disapproval of the Hindus' love for Jesus, and misplaced feelings of insecurity." The second special literature survey is by Douglas L. Berger and Irfan A. Omar on Gerald James Larson's book *India's Agony over Religion* (1995). After delineating the theories that Larson puts forth in analysing the historical as well as the contemporary religio-political situation of India, especially in terms of the "Old" and "New Indic Formations," the authors seem to favour the stand that the "Old," just because it is old, "cannot by any means be construed as the 'foundation' or 'essence' of India to satisfy some conservative representations of national identity," and contend that the "New Indic Formations" "should be full partners in the living multilogue of the [Indian] culture." Although the methodological tools that Larson adopts in analysing the history of Indian thought are challenged as involving illogical leaps, the review authors hope that the "conversation Larson has initiated continues at various levels, as the future of India heavily depends on the 'on-going debate not unlike the one that has always been unfolding through the centuries.'"

Any attempt to understand and propagate the ideal of Hindutva (equated with "Indianness," as the present-day Hindu nationalists try to

impress upon the people of the country as a whole) could have been considered a praiseworthy one, if it were understood as a soul-search by all Indians to identify and commit themselves to the essential and unifying spirit of their cultures and religious life of the people of the Indian subcontinent. The question we are addressing here, however, is not only what Hindutva is in itself, but also what it is made to be. In a blatant disregard to its cultural and religious importance and validity, in the hands of vested interests the same has turned out to be a tool of fanaticism. Religious fanaticism is not only a misguided and exaggerated reaction to certain historical wrongs, but also a conscious but 'blind' adherence to the tenets of a religion or belief system that is made to be the axis of manipulating other adherents for certain vested interests which are diametrically opposed to the generally accepted and articulated central principles of relationship and communion among humans and with the transcendent cosmic reality.

This situation has to be squarely faced by all. Instead of blaming the darkness, the need of the hour is to light at least a tiny candle, the light of which will, in the course of time, enkindle the hope for the nation, and for the world at large. It is true that the contemporary India has plenty of politicians, but the tragedy is that India has very seldom witnessed the presence and activities of true statesmen. Indeed, it is the success of the vested interests in the political scene; but India as a nation should respond to this situation by empowering its collective consciousness. Let it lead the Indian citizens to pledge themselves to a committed transformation of the electoral consciousness of grass-root political communities, along with the educational system that sets the pace for the future. We need the rising of individual stalwarts who would be able to involve in selfless service for the welfare of the nation and the people of India. It demands a commitment to the positive cultural and religious ethos of Indian people, without subscribing to the sectarian and partisan manipulative politics. In order to make it a reality, especially in the context of widespread manipulative politics smeared with caste-creed-sectarianism, the media and the whole educational system have to involve in a longstanding concerted effort. This imposes the imperative that both the media and the educational system should remain outside the power-spectrum of the corrupt and corrupting political parties.

So also, India badly needs truly enlightened religious leaders. Only an enlightened religious leader will be able to lead others into enlightenment. In the context of plurality of religions in India, we need an enlightenment that would initiate the members of a particular religion to transcend its own physical boundaries, and reach out to others, in generosity and understanding. Such a reaching out to the co-pilgrims of other belief systems (and cultural patterns) would enkindle mutual trust and respect, leading to a sensitivity and appreciation of the values, virtues and practices of each other, even if any of them fails to understand the other completely.

Ultimately, the unbecoming strategies adopted by some political parties to enthrone a Hindu theocracy in India should initiate a positive response on the part of every Indian citizen. It demands a concerted, continued and committed action on the part of the people not to be guided by any partisan or sectarian policies, but to remain firm in the pluralistic cultural and religious ethos of the country. There shall be no sacrifice of the pluralistic cultural and religious matrix of India: it constitutes the uniqueness and strength of India as a people and as a nation. This calls on every Indian citizen to willingly recognize, respect and promote the values that each one considers to be central to his or her life without in any way disregarding and disrespecting the other. It is mutual openness, understanding, appreciation and promotion that are to be recognized as central to the life of Indian people, or of any people for that matter, who have the plurality of culture, thought, language and religion as their existential reality and national patrimony.

Saju Chackalackal
Chief Editor, JD

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QUEST FOR SELF-IDENTITY IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Albert Nambiaparambil[♦]

1. Introduction

"I feel within me a crisis between identity and openness!" This is a confession from Monsignor Pietro Rossano, the secretary of the Pontifical (Vatican) Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue. This frank confession occurred in a Meet of the coordinators and directors of inter-religious dialogue, held in the Shivanandashram of Rishikesh, in North India, in November 1980. This meet was organized by the Commission for Dialogue of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), and I was the secretary of the Commission. After an hour of inter-religious songs, mediation and prayers the participants were sharing their expectations, fears, and hopes in the paths of interfaith pilgrimage.

"I cannot say anything about this fear of tension between identity and openness" was a rejoinder from Swami Chidananda, the President of the Shivanandashram, the venue of the Meet. He continued: "the more open you are, the more open we will be, in the process of openness eliciting openness." This planning session of the dialogue-directors came after seven years of my moving around India pushing through different steps aimed at bringing about a change of attitude in different local Christian groups and in other communities, of freedom from hidden fears, of trust and openness. That process was neither easy nor smooth. Two of the participants left the place the very next day early in the morning, taking objection to certain dialogue-oriented steps taken in the very opening session.

♦**Dr. Albert Nambiaparambil cmi,** after procuring his doctorate in philosophy and a long academic career, is a full-time dedicated dialogue partner of religions. Apart from arranging regular dialogue meetings among the members of different religions – nationally and internationally – and holding different offices in this regard, he is a regular contributor to various periodicals and scientific journals on world religions.

2. Dynamics of Living in a Pluralistic Society

The two friends who left the meet took objections in two points: (i) They were unhappy that the opening *bhajan*, devotional song had the word "*om*" in it; and (ii) that I as the organizer of the Meet responded to a sign of greeting from Swami Chidananda in the very same form of salutation (with which he personally greeted me). Today, looking back on that shock in my dialogue-life, I have no surprise at all. I do not blame the two partners who had to leave the place. Living just juxtaposed in a pluralistic society may not create difficulties so long as the individuals opt to live in splendid isolation. There existed a situation wherein this kind of isolation was considered faithfulness to ones own heritage and tradition. In this isolation, however, one need not feel the pain of looking for a language of communicating beyond the enclosing walls of one's own community.

Yet, when an attempt is made to go beyond these walls to meet those of other faith traditions, communication is often bound to fail. You meet with built in prejudices, or stereotypes in the understanding of those of other faiths. A model of self-understanding that was working, successful and meaningful within, so to say, a closed community may be questioned by the openness to those of other faiths, in confronting their models or pictures of self-understanding. Let me explain: In those early days of my dialogue-life, I was happy to hold on to a picture wherein I found myself at the very centre, with those of other faiths as moving around or belonging to the outer circles. I had to give up this picture and searched for another picture, wherein I had to place myself as a fellow-pilgrim with those of other faiths, without in any way sacrificing my self-identity.

Let me bring in an instance: Moving around India, organizing interfaith live-together-sessions of three to four days, one difficulty that I had encountered was to get the right participants from different communities. In 1974, the very first "live-together" was being planned in Shantivanam, the ashram of Father Bede Griffiths. We were looking for the likely invitees. When it came to invite a particular Hindu, I was warned about the person. He was known for his rather critical remarks in periodicals on Christian 'mission', especially on the steps taken to convert others. A high official from Vatican too was expected to take part. I went all the way down to the Ashram to persuade Father Bede not to invite the person. He, however, gave me convincing reasons that the said Hindu should be invited, especially because he was from the neighbourhood.

Reluctantly, though at that stage, I had to give in. Being invited to share personal stories of religious experience this Hindu partner very frankly shared his story. His sharing of the experience was deeply personal, and never said an offensive word to any one. At a later stage in meet, on every participant being invited to contribute any offering to meet the expenses, this fellow-pilgrim gave me a contribution with the words "this is Lord's work, Father Albert, please carry on!"

Even if all precaution were taken in picking up the right partners in interfaith meets, the language of the partners, some times, fail. There was such a moment in Kochi, Kerala, in 1981 during the very final session of approving the draft declaration that emerged in and through four days of deliberation of about three hundred fellow pilgrims from India and from other countries. Father Amalorpavadas, the then director of the NBCLC, Bangalore, was the president of the session. The draft declaration was read out, and it was time for the participants to air their opinion whether the draft of the committee can be accepted as a draft for consideration or to be rejected. There was objection from a section of the participants about certain words as God, Divine, etc., used in the draft. The objection was from the Buddhist Participants. The suggestions to replace some words by others too failed.

It was in this impasse that a new paragraph was brought in by Raimund Panikkar, a key speaker in the Meet. Here it is: We are aware that we do not have a common religious language among ourselves. Although we have tried to express ourselves in the most general terms, still much of what many of us shared together was coloured with meanings and connotations which may not be fully acceptable to persons of all religious traditions. Theistic words like 'God', for instance, 'creator', or 'divine' are unacceptable to Buddhists and Jains and others of the atheistic religious traditions. We want to state, however, that it is always our intention in this declaration to include all genuinely religious experience, even if our limitations of language some times prevent us from doing this with sufficient clarity and accuracy.[1]

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[1]"Declaration, no. 5," in Albert Nambiaparambil, ed., *Religion and Man* (Proceedings of the World Conference of Religions, November 15-21, 1981), Kochi: WFIRC, 1982, 130.

The moment this new paragraph was voted in as an additional number into the declaration there was approval of the draft to be taken up for discussion. Being invited to address Christian and inter-religious groups, often I take off pointing to the limitations of our religious language and the boundaries. I harp on the reflections of Ludwig Wittgenstein on "linguistic use" and on "language-games."[2] Let me recall an instance: I was in the office of Pontifical Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue in Rome along with a Hindu Swami, Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati. I introduced this well-known writer and partner in dialogue to the President of the PCID. The conversation touched the question of reincarnation with the President raising the question, pointing to the divergence in the two traditions, Hindu and Christian. The spontaneous response of the Swami was that both the Christian and the Hindu believe that everything is not over with this life, and that the life is to continue, knowing well that they do not *know* much about the life after.

My effort in interfaith gatherings often begins with an attempt to point to the trespasses from faith language to knowledge language and vice versa. Many a problems of interfaith encounters – I feel – can be resolved or dissolved the moment the partners observe the boundaries of the religious language-games. Often I had been witness to situations wherein matters of faith were raised and discussed in interfaith gatherings as if the discussion was about matters of knowledge. Many an instance of identity crisis in interfaith meets can be faced and a way out found, if the dialogue-partners of different traditions observe the limitations of the language-games involved. I borrow often, to mark out the boundaries of the different uses of language, the paradigm of the language of the kitchen. Every kitchen language is precious, beautiful and meaningful within the kitchen. Once the members are out of the kitchen care is taken to avoid the use of the kitchen language and a shift is made to a language meaningful to the outsiders.

In the sixties, as I started off this dialogue-life, the expression "non-Christian religions" was very much in use in order to speak and write about those of other faiths. I was not that happy with the use of a negative expression in referring to others. My own Hindu and Muslim friends told

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[2] *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Ludwig Wittgenstein" by Norman Malcolm.

me that they too were not happy with the use of the word 'non-Christian' in addressing them. They asked me if I would be happy to be addressed as a 'non-Hindu' or a 'non-Muslim'. However, it must be admitted and positively appreciated that dialogue-partners have started using more affirmative words about each other.

3. Fundamentalism or Fanaticism?

There is a feeling left in me that the encounter of religions or of religious traditions is creating an atmosphere of mutual suspicion, of misuse of language, of calling names! Here is a quote from a note that I got from the e-mail group Interfaith Action sent by P. N. Benjamin with a disclaimer that he doesn't endorse the views of one Rajeev Srinivasan who wrote the essay:

> The Catholic Pope came to India a few years ago and gave a fundamentalist and insensitive speech. Violating the *atithi maryada* of not embarrassing one's hosts, he showed his disdain for the religions and cultures of Asia, expressing his wish for a 'harvest' of souls of Asia in this millennium. Mocking Deepavali, he suggested that true light is only in the acceptance of Christian dogma. What he did not acknowledge is the key: that the native religions of Asia are valid spiritual paths. He did not ask his flock to live in peace with them: cross planting is all he was interested in. This qualifies as communal, provocative speech...[3]

Perhaps it would be good to take note of the use of the word fundamentalist in the very first line quoted. Religious fundamentalism is, I am afraid, a misused word. Is not fundamentalism a positive word? If holding on to the fundamentals of any tradition is what makes one a fundamentalist, isn't this note something positive? I have my Muslim friends who object to the negative overtones given to the word fundamentalist, perhaps after the "September 11." Perhaps the word 'fundamentalism' has to be replaced by 'fanaticism' in the emerging context of the encounter of religious traditions.

It would, however, be good to take note of the undue weight or overtone given to the expressions 'harvest' and the "cross planting" in the above passage. In the paths of interfaith encounters, the partners would do

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[3]Benjamin, "Apartheid in India" 21 April, 2004, in *Rediffnews*.

a great service if trespasses are avoided and the contexts of the linguistic use are outlined. I recall a sentence that my Hindu friends are fond of repeating: *ekam sad viprah bahudha vadanti* – Truth is one; seekers talk of it differently.[4] A very consistent dialogue partner is never tired of telling me: "all religions are the same." In the early stages of our interfaith *pilgrimage* I tried to spell out the differences between religions. Still he insists on using the word: 'same'. Perhaps the inability of the dialogue partners to understand each other is due to the world views involved: what is said from a teleological world-vision may not be easily understood who hears it from a cyclic or spiral world-vision. A faith statement that Jesus is the 'only' redeemer understood as universal and all-inclusive might sound as exclusive to one who is living in a cyclic world vision. Therefore, the different world-visions involved and the boundaries of different languages involved have to be given due weight. Drawing attention to the limits of the use of the words, especially of the highly loaded religious language may be a step in the right direction to the crises that are bound to happen in the meet of the followers of different religious traditions.

Equally important is the picture or models of self-understanding that the partners keep and cherish as members of any particular religious tradition. Often the models are labelled as 'exclusive', 'inclusive', 'pluralistic', etc. Crucial in the openness to those of other traditions is the equality of others. This equality is very easily threatened by some of the pictures that dialogue-partners project.

Let me not give the impression that the dialogue-partners have to advocate or embrace a position of religious indifferentism, of relativism, of compromising one's own heritage. Nor is there any plea here of holding a position that all religious traditions are equal. I fail to understand the meaning of the word *equal* when applied to different religions and traditions. The uniqueness or specificity of any tradition or religion is not, as far as I can see, or need be an issue in the encounter of the believers. A suspension or even a bracketing of commitment to the faith of a community is not at all in question here. Interfaith encounter happens and should happen within the flow of the particular religious tradition to which the partners belong and never in a "no man's land!"

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[4]Rgveda 1.164.46.

A double check of language, modes, and models of interfaith communication is called for, once the partners are seriously committed to meet across the boundaries. They have to do the homework of examining their own understanding of themselves and of others. This should happen within the communities. This is already happening in the communities. This can be called a kind of examination of conscience.

In the early years of interfaith exchanges, the participants of different traditions used to give expositions of the different tenets. The tendency of the exponents was mostly to pick up the positive notes of the tradition in question. The negative notes, if at all any, were more or less attributed to the failure of the believers to live up to the tenets of the tradition represented. True, when it came to the sharing of personal stories, there were confessional contributions, and genuine conversions. The more experiential the sharing was the more enriching were the following exchanges.

Let me mention one of the last interfaith meets, in Kochi, organized by The World Fellowship of Inter-Religious Councils (WFIRC) in December 2003, on Harmony and Non-Violence. In the group discussions that followed the daily input sessions, the participants shared the different expressions of violence in the society. Instances were shared wherein violence of one form or another had religious roots, or tacit or implicit sanctions. It would be in place to cite a few lines from the findings that emerged from this Meet:

> Our weaknesses we humbly admit (1) that some of the texts in our Religious Scriptures are open to misinterpretation and often lead to misunderstanding; (2) that we and some of our religious leaders have often stood as silent spectators, whereas they should have been prophetic in their actions in condemning such acts of injustice; and (3) that rather than engaging in healthy self criticism, some of us have tended to find faults with other religions and spiritual traditions.[5]

There was this ongoing "dialogue intra" within the Christian Churches in India, especially in the Catholic Church. The Church in India Seminar of

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[5] "Declaration of the Interfaith Meet on Harmony and Non-Violence," organized by WFIRC, at Renewal Centre, Kochi, Kerala, India, on December 13-16, 2004.

1969 was one such event. As a participant in that event and as one involved for years in the work of the promotion of interfaith dialogue in India,[6] I am a witness to the growth in the self-understanding of the Christian partners in dialogue and in the understanding of those of other faiths. A new "dialogic-self-identity" is emerging. This was not a smooth sailing. There were tensions and there are still tensions in relating the different paths implied and involved in the Christian vocation, among the paths of dialogue, liberation, healing, education, proclamation, etc. This "dialogue-within" is very healthy and necessary for individuals and communities engaged in the process of openness eliciting openness.

As a participant in the "Church in India Seminar" I witnessed the tension within the participants in the workgroup on dialogue, especially on the duty of the educators to provide for the religious education of the students of other faiths entrusted to their care in Christian educational institutions. The issue was raised, discussed; but we failed to arrive at a consensus. This was raised again when the Commission for Dialogue introduced the very first draft of the "Guidelines for Dialogue" for discussion. Later on, when the Commission, in 1989, brought out a revised edition of the "Guidelines," it was accepted as a Christian duty to provide for the religious education of other faiths as well. A passage from this *Guidelines for Inter-Religious Dialogue* is an instance of genuine conversion from within:

> Students belonging to other religions in our schools and colleges should be given every opportunity, encouragement and tactful guidance to grow up as truly and personally religious believers. Otherwise, especially if the students are under our exclusive care for a long time, they may drift into a religious vacuum. As Christian educators, we have no authority, and perhaps no sufficient competence, to teach Hinduism to Hindus, Islam to Muslims, Buddhism to Buddhists, etc. Within the limits of our possibilities, we are called to help our students to deepen their understanding of their own religious traditions and scriptures. It is also recommended that

[6]Amalorpavadass, ed., *The Church in India* (Proceedings of the National Seminar, held at Dharmaram College, Bangalore, India in 1970), Bangalore: NBCLC, 1970.

whenever possible this be done also with the help of members of the respective traditions.[7]

Echoes of this on-going dialogue within or "dialogue-intra," are being heard from outside the Christian boundaries. There are among them apparently critical, not so sympathetic exponents. They too are doing important service for the new self-identity to emerge in the dynamic osmosis of living communities. Arun Shourie's controversial book, *Missionaries in India*, is just one of these reactions or responses to the dialogue-intra in the self-evaluation of the Church in India, in the field of evangelisation. Here are a few lines from Shourie referring to the background paper presented in a Meet of the Church in India to take stock of the evangelisation in India:

> It reiterates what Vatican II acknowledged – that redemption may be attained through other religions too. Where the others used to be looked upon as heathens living in torment, they are spoken of as ones "in whom the Spirit has also worked wonders." Were the fact that so; many were still continuing in their old ways was earlier seen as the challenge that the Lord had put before Christians, as the unkempt field which every Christian was in duty bound to till to garner the "great harvest" for the Church, the fact that the Lord has even till today allowed these others to continue in their old faiths, that fact is now seen as a part of the ineffable mystery of God, and of the way He works to realize His will. The challenge now is to simply to save them by converting them, it is also to comprehend the purpose of God in allowing them to continue in their old beliefs, and in fact also on occasion redeeming them through these beliefs.[8]

My attempt here is not at all that of making critical remarks on the author of the book. Rather, my intention is to point to the fact that the dialogue-within a community (dialogue-intra) will produce vibrations outside. Equally important is the fact that the self-identity of the different communities-in-dialogue is emerging in and through the process of different dialogues-intra within these communities, demanded,

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[7]CBCI, *Guidelines for Inter-Religious Dialogue*, New Delhi: The CBCI Dialogue Commission, 1989, no.104.

[8]Arun Shourie, *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Chances, Dilemmas*, New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994, 215.

necessitated and occasioned by the dialogue of communities across the boundaries. My hope is that a new self-identity is and will emerge through these exchanges.

4. Overload of Nationalism and Revivalism

Any meaningful discussion on "identity crisis" against the background of the encounter of religions in India should pay attention to the topic of religious nationalism, to the politicisation of religion, to the so-called Hindutva agenda. There is the cry of "secularism in danger." Due recognition is to be given to the revival that is happening within different religious traditions. Discussions are on *jihad*, and on the fight against 'terrorism' after 9/11. Iraq, Afghanistan, the ethnic cleansing in Yugoslavia, etc., are just a few wounded memories with which we have to live on. In India, the wounds left by the demolition of the Baabri-Masjid of Ayodhya are not at all healed. Efforts are on to a painful discovery of one's own self-identity along with the efforts at opening out to those of other traditions. This, indeed, is not a smooth sailing.

The changing political situations are naturally affecting the different dialogue partners. When attempts are made to politicise religion to make political gains, the pictures of self-identity that the dialogue participants keep are called into question. If and when the Hindutva agenda is projected as the test of nationalism this very test will become dubious! The dynamic quest of self-identity may become static. A revivalism is setting in within the different traditions to fall back on certain static norms of exhibiting one's faithfulness to one or the other tradition. To be national may, in the process of this politicisation of religion, mean to exhibit a set pattern of behaviour in tune with the heritage of one of the communities involved. The nationalism of the dialogue-partners of other communities will be in question. This may result in power games and displays of certain pictures or symbols of self-identity. In the place of opening out and dialogue, a closing in may happen. This, in turn, my lead to fanatic trends within the different communities. In the place of openness eliciting openness, fanatic closures or isolation may elicit further and deeper isolation. Nationalism demands a great deal from every citizen. When a mix of religion and nationalism happens, however, openness among members of different religions and interfaith dialogue are in danger.

Instances of tension in the very process of openness to those of other religious and spiritual traditions are reported in the media. Even a small tension within a community gains wide publicity when the rituals or practices of the tradition are seen and publicized as the cause of division in a society. I wonder if any community or religious tradition is exempt from this phenomenon. Recently, wide publicity was given in the media to a police action in preventing a ritual known as "*Elavoor thookam*" in a temple, at Elavoor, near Angamaly in Kerala. Here the tension was apparently between two groups or wings within the Hindu community itself. *The Hindu* of April 23 and 24, 2004 carried the report on the tension in the very front page.[9]

Call to revival and a new discovery of one's own self-identity is going on and on within the different traditions and communities. This should follow as the fruit of the dialogue intra. The tension between identity and openness, if this happens in the very process of opening out to the wider horizons of other religious and spiritual traditions, is something healthy and, certainly, to be welcomed. In and through the dialogue intra the partners will come out of their narrow-mindedness, enriched with a new self-confidence and with a language suitable and apt for the encounter of dialogue families.

There is another form of revival too: that of hardening and of closing in. A symbol of a particular tradition, for example, a symbol of harmony and love, may in this very process become a symbol of "closing in." The symbol of harmony and of communion may be made, manipulatively, into a symbol of dividing the communities. The call to 'nationalism' may, thus, turn out to be the call to the discovery of a new religious, but fanatic identity. Any group closed in or hardened in this process can be easily victimized in the political game or in the politicisation of religion. Let me not point an accusing finger at any tradition in particular. This would be a sign of danger. Any political party will be inclined to the vote banks, and a closed-in group may become a vote-bank to a particular political party. The "religion is in danger" card is being played by the players in the game of politics. Nationalism, however beautiful and praiseworthy may it be,

[9]"Ban on '*Thookkam*': Tension at Elavoor," *The Hindu*, April 23, 2004, 1; see also "Bid to Perform Elavoor '*Thookam*' Foiled," *The Hindu*, April 24, 2004, 1.

would, thus, turn out to be a tool of exploitation of the national consciousness and sentiments of the innocent citizens of any nation.

5. Building on the 'Conversion' Fear

In 1981, as we organized the very first World Conference of Religions in Kochi, there was much tension in the south of India around the conversion of a village, called Meenakshipuram, to Islam. The participants of the Meet had this hidden fear, which was voiced in the group meetings and became louder in the group-meetings and in the drafting stage of the final declaration. What surprised many of us was the fact that the then Governor of Kerala, Jothi Vencatachellum, faced the issue squarely in the very inaugural address. Here are her words in a quote from the report that appeared in the *Indian Express* covering her speech:

> The Governor said that there was nothing to worry if conversions took place. Every religion had an in-built, inherent strength, stability and moral force to sustain its adherents, and change of religion was a matter of personal conviction. If man was oppressed and suppressed, he became depressed and looked elsewhere for self-respect and dignity. No religion as such makes any difference between man and man. All were equal before God.[10]

Let this be noted that many a dialogue partner has this hidden fear that the dialogue move, when this comes from a Christian partner, has the hidden agenda of 'conversion'. As secretary of the Commission for Dialogue of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), back in the eighties, I moved around in India organizing interfaith encounters, multi-religiously organized, on values in the fast changing world. One question that was repeatedly raised and addressed by the panellists and by the participants was: is the right to move from one religion to another an essential ingredient of human rights or is this against humanity? Practically everywhere the response was positive, that this right is integral to humanity. The inhibited fear of the dialogue partners have to be surfaced and cleared in and through interfaith exchanges, which may, sometimes, be painful and hurting.

It may be worth mentioning one painful but enriching encounter that we went through the Millennium Peace in the UN, in New York, in 2000.

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[10]Nambiaparambil, ed., *Religion and Man*, 28.

The topic of discussion was that of giving and receiving financial aids. One of the speakers of the plenary, His Eminence Francis Cardinal Arinze (from Vatican, Rome) in this world of unjust, unequal distribution of wealth, there is a duty on the rich nations to share their resources, to give financial aids to the less privileged, and that the poor nations have the right to receive such aids. This sharing, however, was objected to by a section of Hindu leaders with the argument that extending financial aids is used as a means of converting the poor. The result of such an intervention was an atmosphere of high tension. Later on, a group of us, five from each side made an attempt, to arrive at a reconciliation. The discussion in this group, too, was not that smooth. But we arrived at a reconciliation formula asserting the right of Christians to proclaim the Gospel, that proselytising is to be avoided, that there is the duty to give and right to receive financial aids, that extending of such aids should not be used as a means for conversion, and, finally, that we have to earn each other's confidence that financial aids are not used for religious conversion.[11]

6. Conclusion

Identity is and will remain the central issue in interfaith pilgrimages. The partners in this onward journey have to discover again and again, always anew, their own self-identity. In this process they will go through a process of purification and language-shocks. A hardening may happen as we move on. Fanaticism of any kind, even in the cover of mistaken nationalist identity, is a danger to be confronted by the fellow-pilgrims.

A new atmosphere is being set in India, following the political elections in India. The word 'secularism' was flouted by opposing groups during the election campaign. The word Hindutva, too, was very much in the heated atmosphere. Politicisation of religion is a card that is often played by the different parties to keep the vote-banks behind the contestants in elections. A new soul-searching is on as to the success or failure of the different cards played in the political game. Then, partners in the pilgrimage of dialogue, too, have this challenge of keeping the hope in communion, in openness eliciting openness, in a quest for the dynamic self-identity.

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[11] Albert Nambiaparambil, *Pilgrims on the Seashore of Endless Worlds*, Bangalore: ATC, 2002, 130-131.

I recall Swami Chidananda of Rishikesh, who went around distributing the prayer of Francis Assisi in an interfaith live together, back in 1974. I would end this sharing citing his words that he wrote in the *Festshrift* that was presented to me for my sixtieth birthday. Winding up his deep personal note of felicitation he makes this appeal to be "instrumental in opening the hearts and widening the horizons of perceptions of many others engaged in similar tasks by imparting to them a clarity of vision and a fine awareness of the fundamental spiritual unity of all existence, the essential in-depth harmony of faiths and ultimate Oneness of Cosmic Reality that transcend all human systems that exist in our tiny planet earth. Last but not least, our present-day conflict-ridden human society badly needs more such persons..."[12]

[12] A. Pushparajan, ed., *Pilgrims of Dialogue* (A Collection of Essays Presented to Fr. Albert Nambiaparambil in Honour of His 60th Birthday), Kochi: Vianny Printings, 1991, 179.

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HINDUTVA: THE SPIRIT OF HINDUISM

G. C. Nayak♦

By Hindutva, I mean that which constitutes the very sprit, the essence of Hinduism. The fundamental question, however, that we have to address is: "What exactly would constitute this spirit?" For me, it is a million-dollar question that has flabbergasted many, including laymen as intellectuals, and even the leaders themselves. However, there should be nothing mysterious about it, unless one refuses to accept that Hinduism is as vast as the ocean and as limitless as the sky. The paradox seems to stare us in our face in the fact that the essence of Hinduism lies not only in the Hindu religious beliefs and practices but also beyond the narrow framework in which the Hindu religion is manifested in its popular form. It is paradoxical; as yet it is true of Hindutva, the spirit of Hinduism. It points to a typical form of transcendence intrinsic to Hinduism itself which I would designate as transcendental secularism. Secularism of this typical variety, it needs to be noted, is not an accidental feature of Hinduism, but is unavoidably associated with its intrinsic nature. Here lies the perennial attraction of Hindutva as well as its apparent mystery when it comforts us in our face along with its religious dogmas and practices. It needs to be discussed in some detail, which I propose to do in the sequel.

The secular ideas in Hinduism are found and are embedded in the very structure of what is popularly known as Hindu religion. Although it is true that different forms of worship, varieties of colourful temple constructed for the purpose of such worship of different gods and goddess and the well-known Brahmanical priests and preachers with their specific religious dogmas are no less conspicuous in Hinduism, it is at the same time worth-noting that from the very beginning of the Hindu civilization there has been another counter-trend running throughout this culture which cannot be depicted as narrowly religious by any stretch of imagination. This trend has been some times so predominant in its heritage that

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♦**Prof. Dr. G. C. Nayak,** a renowned scholar on Hinduism and related themes, has contributed his might to unravel the multi-dimensional nature of Hinduism through his numerous writings, and is currently a Fellow at IIAS, Shimla, India.

religious dogmas and forms of worship have been relegated in that context to a secondary status in principle as well as in practice. This is mainly due to a uniquely monistic type of thought prevailing in the Hindu culture from the time of its very inception in the Vedic days.[1] It will be difficult not to admit that Hinduism, in this form, is one of the unique manifestations in the human civilization of what I would paradoxically designate as a secular religion, and this aspect cannot be lost sight of when we try to pinpoint what Hindutva is.

A little elaboration of this idea may not be out of place here. In its monistic aspect, Hinduism presents to us a unique picture of a non-dogmatic religion. Is there any specific object of worship, any particular object of "ultimate concern" as distinguished from all others? Is there anything in particular which alone is intensively valued, considered holy or sacred, at the cost of any other value, entity or ideal in Hinduism, considered in its uniquely monistic aspect? Rather, one must admit that here everything is considered holy, every value is considered to be a matter of concern, every bit of life, personal or social, is considered sacred. Here lies its commitment, its "ultimate concern," because of which I regard it to be the manifestation of a deeply religious attitude, but with a difference, of course. Śaṅkara would put it in the most convincing manner as follows: "The whole world is a heavenly pleasure-garden, all trees are wish-fulfilling trees, all waters are as holy as the waters of Ganga, all activities are sacred, all words, whether religious or secular, constitute the Vedanta, the whole earth a place of pilgrimage like Varanasi, and the entire existence is centred on the ultimate reality, for one who has encountered Brahman, realizing the oneness, or better the non-duality, or existence" (*Samastaṃ jagadeva nandanavanaṃ, sarvepi kalpadṛmāḥ*, etc). This is a unique expression of transcendence in the whole world literature. Specific worship of gods and goddess, and definite dogmas or religion are relegated to a secondary position in this ideology. Moreover, it is pointed out that it makes little sense to talk of worshipping the one without a second, the infinite.

This, however, is not the whole story about Hinduism. In any case, *karmakāṇḍa*, the ritual, howsoever obsolete it might have been in its

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[1]Acarya Sri Govinda Chandra Pandey. *Ekam Sad Vipra bahudha vadanti*, Varanasi: Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, 1997.

particular details, is no less influential in the life of an average Hindu than the *jñānakāṇḍa*, the philosophical wisdom, and is rather on certain occasions like birth and marriage ceremonies or at the time of death found to have a distinct hold on the Hindu psyche in general. *Bhakti* or devotion, tāntric and yogic practices also add their respective colours to the multi-dimensional and multi-coloured character of Hinduism. In any case, it would be far from reality if Hinduism as it is envisaged in the Advaitic ideology of non-dualism is regarded as the one and only truth about Hinduism. The secular base is provided by the Advaita no doubt, but at the same time adherence to peculiar forms of worship of different deities and sticking to particular sectarian ways are also found to be at least as much prevalent as the ideas of what I designate as transcendental secularism, a typically Hindu philosophy of value.[2]

Hinduism is well known for its tolerance and accommodative nature.[3] This is no doubt intrinsic to Hinduism and is evident in the following statement of Lord Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: "Those who worship other gods, they also worship me and serve me, albeit not in accordance with the prescribed rules" (9.23). Here a unique attitude of tolerance and liberal attitude towards other forms of worship and other deities is quite evident. Moreover, one cannot lose sight of the open declaration of understanding and tolerance made by Gauḍapādācārya and Śaṅkarācārya, the two great exponents of the Advaita school of thought, in respect of the dualist schools with whom they are supposed to come to a class from time to time.[4] It seems that tolerance is the natural concomitant of transcendental form of monism which provides a philosophical basis for this unique culture of transcendence, i.e., the Hindu culture; a deliberate striving from harmony (*samanvaya*) could also be detected in some other systems of thought in this tradition.[5] Ācārya Paṭṭābhirāma Śāstri clearly

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[2]G. C. Nayak, *Understanding Religious Phenomenon*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997, 66-67.

[3]Balasubramanian, R. ed., *Tolerance in Indian Culture*, New Delhi: ICPR, 1992.

[4]See Nayak, "Tolerance in Advaita," in Balasubramanian, R. ed., *Tolerance in Indian Culture*, 121-130.

[5]See Ācārya Paṭṭābhirāma Śāstri, ed., *Sbara Bhasyam*, New Delhi, 1984, Introduction (in Sanskrit) on "*Samanvayātmaka panthā*" (the integrating path) of the Mimamsakas.

points out that the Mīmāṁsakas also take resort to the path of harmony and integration; to put it in his own words, "*Ayameva samarvayātmakaḥ pantha mīmāṁsakairasritaḥ.*"

It is significant to note that a culture that could meaningfully boast of the highest enlightenment had in actual practice descended at times to the lower manifestations of consciousness in the form of superstitions, fanaticism, bigotry and intolerance. There have been, however, reformers and spiritual leaders like Swami Vivekananda[6] and even political leaders of the unique stature like Gandhi,[7] who have given fresh impetus in the right direction, and in future we are only to carry this work with unfailing zeal so that this unique culture of transcendence does not lose itself in the mires of intolerance, superstitions, sectarian rigidities and hatred. It would be definitely wrong to identify Hindutva exclusively with any one of such manifestations.

Hinduism of the future generation can reasonably be expected to keep itself away from such superstitions and perversions, as far as possible, even if it need not free itself from rituals, methods of worship, specific meditation procedures and institutions peculiar to itself. Institutions and rituals, however, need not lead to any class amongst different religious denominations, provided the Hindu ideal of tolerance is taken seriously along side its diversification. This should be specially taken care of by Hinduism in the new millennium and I think that present generation youth will have a very important role to play in bringing tolerance and harmony to the forefront while dealing not only with all its own diverse sects and rituals but also with other religions which have become part of its own societal texture. They can be expected to give leadership in this regard with Ramakrishna's ideology of "*Yata mat, tata path*" (as many religious views, so many paths) in their mind.[8] Even the *Śiva Mahima* also corroborates the view that the same reality is

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[6]Swami Vivekananda, *Rousing Call to Hindu Nation* (compiled by Eknath Ranade), Calcutta: Centenary Publications, 1963.

[7]R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966. See especially last chapter, "Yudhisthira returns."

[8]See also Thakur Anukul Chandra, *Satyanusaran*, Deoghar: Satsang Publishing House, 1994, pages 20 and 21: "Views may be many even as many as there are people. Still, Dharma cannot be many... In fact, there is no opposition in the views – different views, the same way – feeling one in many forms."

approachable through different ways according to different tastes (*ṛeīnāṁ vaicitryād*) of the people. The same tolerance should be visible in the approach of Hinduism to other world-religions, too. That this is a special feature of Hindutva cannot be denied even by its worst critic.

Hindutva may take the leadership in the future in the sense that it may show the way how to co-exist with others not only peacefully but also by doing positive good to others in promoting the cause of their respective religions which, if practised in right earnest, can ultimately lead to the highest. If it is really our conviction, as it should be, that there is no real difference in respect of the highest to be attained by different religions and that there is only a difference in the path, not in the destination, then we should be able to demonstrate our conviction in and through our practice. Certainly, any idea of converting others by some sort of forcible conversion to our point of view is out of question so far as Hindutva is concerned, for that is an imposition of one's own ideology on others to which Hindus, at least true Hindus, are allergic to the core.

Is dogma intrinsic to religion? I do not think so. Certainly it is not so always and in all cases; at least it cannot be regarded as a necessary feature of Hinduism.[9] Not a mere glib talk about but a rigorous practice of love and tolerance in the light of the teaching of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā* holds the key for the growth of religion devoid of dogma in future. Hinduism can pave the way for a religious harmony through open dialogues with other world-religions to be carried on without rigid dogmas, but not without faith-commitments, of course.

Here I would like to draw the attention of the learned scholars to the observations of the renowned Ācārya, late Chandrasekharendra Saraswatī of Śrī Kāmakoti Peetham, Kanchipuram, who was reverend during his lifetime by one and all. While talking of "Religion and Religious Practices," the Ācārya gives us a basic principle to be followed in this regard: "If a thing is good basically, but for some cause evil resulted from it," says the Ācārya, "the sane view is to retain the thing for its good and to eliminate the root cause of the evil result." He further admonishes that

> we should first of all stop criticizing and finding fault with other religions and religious sects. We should examine ourselves first and

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[9]See G. C. Nayak, *Understanding Religious Phenomenon*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1997.

> see if we have lived up to the requirements of our religions, before we proceed to criticize the other man's religion. Religion is intended to elevate human beings spiritually and to bring them nearer and nearer to God. Before we begin to advise others, we should conquer *kāma* (petty desires), *krodha* (anger) and *dveṣa* (hatred). We should approach all religions with a spirit of humility and appreciate the good points in all religions.[10]

Though a Hindu Ācārya of eminence, his eulogistic homage to the Buddha is worthy of note.

> The life story of the Buddha evokes in us peace, compassion and bliss. The innumerable images of the Buddha found in all parts of the country also produce in us the triple effect of *śānti* (peace), *karuṇā* (compassion) and *ānanda* (bliss). Somehow, an impression has been gained that Buddhism stood for atheism. We were also told by some historians that this religion was driven out of India. But the numerous Buddhist works in Sanskrit and Pali, and the Ashokan edicts have revealed to us the nobility of the Awakened One (the Buddha) and have filled us with pride that this great soul was born in India.[11]

This is a typically Hindu attitude towards other religions and an appraisal by Hinduism of the masters of other religions. This can be easily extended to the Hindu appraisal of Islam and Christianity, too. As a matter of fact, another genius amongst Hindu religious leaders of the twentieth century, Thākur Anukul Chandra, founder of the Satsang Movement, has given a call, a clarion call for that matter, not to make any distinction between the Buddha and Jesus, on the one hand, and between Kṛṣṇa and Muhammad, on the other. "They are one and the same, don't you know?" He asks: "*Eki tara tui janis re*!" This, once again, is a typical Hindu appraisal of other religions and religious leaders, and this is very much in keeping with genuine Hindutva, the essential spirit of Hinduism.

The crucial point at issue for us, however, is how can any one, any ordinary human being for that matter, emulate the spirit of such Ācāryas and religious leaders like Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswatī and Thākur

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[10]Cited in Balasubramanian, R. ed., *Tolerance in Indian Culture*, New Delhi: ICPR, 1992, 14-15.

[11]Cited in Balasubramanian, R. ed., *Tolerance in Indian Culture*, New Delhi: ICPR, 1992, 16.

Anukul Chandra, in one's religious life and dealings with other religions? The point intimately connected with this is whether such a catholic spirit would not dilute perhaps our faith-commitments when they are expected to be taken most seriously and whether it would not end up in some sort of frivolity in religion, at least in case of those who scarcely know how serious a religious life of commitment and dedication is supposed to be. It is, however, a fact to be noted that the catholicity of spirit does not mar in anyway the seriousness of religious commitments of eminent religious leaders such as Ācārya Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswatī and Thākur Sri Anukul Chandra. The catholicity of spirit has been taken here as something natural to religion in view of the fact that we are supposed to transcend petty desires, anger and hatred if we are to live a truly religious life, according to the Ācārya. The problem, a Herculean one for that matter, lies in initiating the sectarian leaders and their followers in this direction when in most cases they display as a rule, bigotry and fanaticism in propagating the ideology of a particular sect or a particular religious group and stake their whole life and existence for achieving victory at any cost on their opponents. Dogma is the be-all and end-all in many such cases, and the question whether there can be religion without dogma is, therefore, relevant and significant in this context and also in the context of a truly religious life in general.

In religion, as it seems, we encounter a unique phenomenon of a total commitment and deduction to that which is considered to be the highest and the best along with a genuine need to uplift the humanity at large in the direction of that ultimate goal. I am, of course, not referring here to aberrations of religion which might have played havoc at times in the history of humankind. A truly religious person is guided and inspired by what I would call a "unique concern for the weakling," a concern for all those who are weak in some respect or the other. The entire life of a truly religious person is orientated towards the alleviation of the sufferings of the weak and downtrodden. Different sorts of weakness may be found in different persons, groups, or nations needing adequate treatment at the hands of a truly religious man. Such weaklings may belong to the class of rich or poor, learned or illiterate, and even the powerful or the powerless. The concern of the truly religious man is with the common weaknesses and drawbacks which cause suffering to the humanity at large, and this is the sense in which I have designated it as a "concern for the weakling." A

king from this point of view may be considered a weakling in a certain context and may benefit immensely from the contact of a truly religious person. The life history of Ashoka may be cited as a case in point. This "concern for the weakling" could be a whole-time passion with the religious man. Somewhere arrogance of the rich and the powerful perhaps, elsewhere absolute depression of the down-trodden and the desolate, and inveterate hatred of one for the other, egocentricity in severe form, etc., could take any form of weakness, of course, including obvious moral and spiritual failings of men/women. Is there any end to such contingencies in human situation! The only thing which needs to be remembered in this connection is that the term 'weakling' here does not refer to any specific class of person, groups, or nations. The reference is to the inherent human weakness, wherever and in whatever form it may be found, even despite appearances to the contrary at times. This may be regarded as a sort of therapeutic conception of religion. It is significant that Chandrakirti in his *Prasannapada* 18.6 refers to the Buddha as a great doctor (*Mahavaidyaraja*) who administers medicine in accordance with the specific nature of the disease of the people. This is the sense in which God has been regarded as "*Dīnabandhu*" (a friend of the poor and the weak) in Hinduism. Apart from this, Guru Nanak has declared that he is a friend of the lowliest ("*Nīca andar nīca jāti nīchihu ati nīcu, Nānaku tin kai saṅga sāthi badiā siu kyā ris*"). So also, Buddha's '*mahākaruṇā*' points in the same direction. In the Bible, Jesus, the Son of God, is well-known to have a definite soft corner for the "weakling" and prophet Mohammed's concern for the poor and the weak is no less conspicuous. Vivekananda, one of the great leaders of Hinduism and an undisputable exponent of Hindutva, is known to have given a call to treat the poor and the illiterate as the object of veneration (*Daridra devo bhava, mūrkha devo bhava*).[12] This is a regular feature in the world religions which needs to be highlighted. As a typical exponent of Hinduism, I myself also would assess and appraise religion, in general, and all world-religions in this light. The concern for the weak in the religious person seems to find its inspiration from the realization that one has encountered the highest and the best in one's life and that this unique experience needs to be shared with others who are less fortunate. It is significant that these features are

[12]See Vivekananda, *Rousing call to Hindu Nation*, 93.

found both in Godless religions and religions having faith in different types of divinity or Godhead in the context of world religions.

William James has made some interesting observations in the context of aberrations found in religion which need to be discussed at some length. He points out that

> religious after a fashion, they (Men's minds) yet have many other things in them besides their religions, and unholy entanglements and associations inevitably obtain. The baseness so commonly charged to religion's account is, thus, almost all of them, not chargeable at all to religion proper, but rather to religion's wicked practical partner, the spirit of corporate dominion. And the bigotries are most of them in their turn chargeable to religion's wicked intellectual partner, the spirit of dogmatic dominion, the passion for laying down the law in the form of an absolutely closed theocratic system. The ecclesiastical spirit in general is the sum of these two spirits of dominion.[13]

Though there is no doubt some truth here in what James has said, it is, however, only a partial truth. Instead of putting the entire blame at the door of the ecclesiastical spirit, one should take note of certain intrinsic features of religion proper and a possible infiltration of bigotry in and through those very features. It seems to be a significant feature about religion that there cannot be a religion without a total commitment or devotion to that which it considers to be the highest and the best. It is, therefore, nothing strange or extraordinary that a religious person or a religious institution should have one's or its own total commitments. One such commitment or devotion may have its origin in some such Gospel as that of Mark, "Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength," and another may get one's inspiration from the invocation of Sri Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad Gītā* to take resort to Him, forsaking all considerations of dharma (*sarva dharmān partityajya māmekaṃ śaraṇaṃ braja*). Even one may be said to be committed to tolerance, to the point of view that all the diverse paths of different religions lead to the same goal, as is the case in Hinduism in one of its typical manifestations, or, on the other hand, one may be committed exclusively to one particular path. In this sense, the life

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[13]William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York: The Modern Library, 1929, 330-31.

of a truly religious man is a typically dedicated life; there is not only a plain concern here, but also an ultimate concern and commitment without which it cannot be regarded as religious. This ultimate concern, leading to a total commitment or a typical dedication to its cause can easily make room for bigotry and fanaticism, when extended too far beyond the reasonable limits.

Fanaticism is a sort of misguided and exaggerated reaction. There may be difference of opinion regarding someone being misguided or having an excessive reaction, of course, but when it turns out to be resulting in a meaningless destruction of life, for example, can the reaction be regarded as any thing but exaggerated and excessive? Is it not a fact that human life at least is intrinsically valuable irrespective of any other consideration and that if innocent people are destroyed unnecessarily should there be something intrinsically wrong or defective in our approach itself?

While it is a definite virtue to be committed to one's faith, fanaticism and bigotry cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be regarded as virtuous. It should be borne in mind that an appreciation of the opponent's point of view and of other persons' commitment to their own faith is a virtue which needs to be cultivated deliberately. Tolerance is not merely a virtue of the weak; it can only be a virtue of the strong. This tolerance is a necessary feature of Hindutva, understood in its proper perspective.

Institution, for all we know, is usually a vital part of religion, and religious institutions, it is true, have been responsible for perpetuating much of the malevolent and wicked practices. But wickedness does not lie so much in the institutionalisation of religion as in the bigotry and pigheadedness of the maniacs. A devotee is not a maniac and religious attitude is not properly represented by the attitude of a maniac; advocacy of Hindutva, it needs to be reiterated, is not and cannot meaningfully fit into, the manifesto of a maniac.

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THE HUMAN AS RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR

A Search into the Religious and Secular Ideologies of Our Time

V. F. Vineeth♦

"The earth is like honey to all beings and all beings are like honey to the earth. The shining immortal person who lives in the earth lives in your body" (Br. Up. II.5.1).

"The Lord God formed man from dust and breathed into him his spirit and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7).

These two texts from the Hindu and the Christian traditions show how a human person is both mundane and divine. The human being is born of the earth and at the same time participates in the divine nature. He/she is a wonderful combination of the earthly and the heavenly. This is the reason why the humans feel a constant tension between these two poles of their existence.

Here is a description of the Hindu *rath yatra* scheduled to end at Ayodhya where a Muslim Mosque exists for 300 years. The *yatra* begins from Somnath on 25 September 1991.

> ... As the roar of the ocean on the morning of September 25th 1991 mingled with the chanting of vedic hymns and cries of *Har Har Mahadev* and *sougandh Ram ki khate hai, mandir wahim banayenge,* Shri Advani lifted a bow, its arrow pointing to Ayodhya. It was presented by the tribals of Ambaji. The priest of Somnath temple presented him a saffron *dgarna dgwaha*. The fisherman from Dwaraka, after presenting a conch, blew it to mark the occasion. The Gohil Samaj of the Kshatriyas presented Advaniji with a sword. The

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> mood of the milling crowd who came to wave-off the BJP President on his 36-day-long *dharma yuddha* had one clear message to convey – that they expected him to succeed and that they would even lay down their lives in the fight for the cause.[1]

Thus, it is said, except for the female grace, Advani looked like the goddess Durga who came down from heaven with numerous weapons received from different gods in her march to kill the evil king Mahishasura. Advani was the then president of the Indian nationalist political party called BJP (Bharathiya Janata Party, meaning "Indian People's Party") and is the present Home Minister of India where his party together with other parties in coalition governs India. The *rath yatra* symbolises Hindu triumphalism, purportedly, redeeming the historical wrongs once done by other religions, especially by the Muslims. Since then there had been different marches and *yatras* taken up by the "elite" Hindus to arouse the sentiments of the common people and extending to all of them a clarion call to be a nation of Hindu theocracy destined to reign India. These programmes sent shock waves all through the country, especially to the believers in non-Hindu religions and thus became another call for their own self-defence. Hinduism trying to gather energy from all over India marches forward with the obvious intention to rule the country with an ideology that is religiously characterised. This takes us to the problem of religious ideology in contrast to secular ideologies. Religion and secularism confront each other as political ideologies. This is the background in which we are studying the contemporary world and the role religions and ideologies play in it.

It should, however, be said in all fairness that the whole Hindu India is not for such a political reign of Hindu theocracy all over India. So many prominent Hindus, like K. N. Panikkar, Shrivastsava and many others, boldly condemn such theocratic approaches in politics. In a democracy like India, they maintain, we shall never envisage the rule of the majority determined by religious affiliation, rather the majority shall always be made on the basis of the people's adherence to a party in the parliament. Before we come to an analysis of the theocratic Hindu ideology in

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[1]V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, Delhi, 1989, cited in K. N. Panikar, *Communal Threat and Secular Challenge*, Madras: Earthworm Books, 1997, 157-158.

contemporary India, let us briefly compare and contrast religion and secularism.

In the history of humanity we witness the tension between religion and secularism rising and receding. We like earth, garden and mountains. We relax in woods, on riverbanks and retire to forests. We find ourselves happy in the heart of nature. Born of the earth time and again we return to earth, relish earthly fruits, take earthly medicines. Our health is very much dependent on our relation to the whole world, to nature and to the earth. When earth is in danger it is our life that is in danger. When the plants of the earth are contaminated by the greedy operations of the scientific man, our food from the earth becomes poisonous. Our health is in danger. However, neither a lot of land nor a large quantity of food does make us happy beyond a limit. We want also to rise above all material things at our disposal. Above all these, we are blessed with self-awareness that makes us capable of self-determination and self-transcendence. We transcend ourselves, and all that we are surrounded with. This is an indication that something great, something spiritual, something divine is within us. Therefore, there is an innate urge for self-transcendence and a quest for the Divine. This is a search into the unuttered and the unbound reality which is reflected in everything what we see and what we are. Hence, there is the scope for an open dialogue between religion and secularism.

1. What is Religion?

Religion can be so naïve and even crude as a blind worship of an object, an idol, which is somehow related to Divinity. Religion can also be so subtle and elevated as a refined faith-commitment to Transcendence, beyond the flux of space and time which influences one's thought and way of life. Oscillating between these two extremes, religion is usually presented to us as a historical reality with a belief system and worship patterns, with a communitarian consciousness and a set of behavioural rules. The above-mentioned definition takes us to both dimensions of human reality, namely the secular and the religious.

Religion is never in the abstract. It is lived here and now. Hence, however trans-temporal it may rise up to, any true religion wants to take us to this earth too. It should have relational attitude to this earth: this can be acceptance of the earth in which we live and transcendence of the same in our orientation to the Divine. If acceptance of earthly bliss alone is seen

without a certain degree of transcendence, religion fails in meeting its ultimate goal. In the same way if transcendence is stressed to the neglect of the earthly dimension, it may give rise to a counter culture of religionless secularism.

Karl Marx described religion as "the opium of the people." His intention, however, is also explained along with it. He says: "religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, the soul of the soulless environment."[2] In other words, according to Marx, religion is a kind of escapism, an illusory happiness in which we are neither happy with the real nor ready to face it directly.

2. Religionless Secular Ideologies

Many of the secular ideologies are a-religious or even anti-religious. Anti-religious ideologies are mainly motivated by the failure of religion. By drawing the human attention totally to the supernatural world, religions may fail to look into the heart of reality in which we live, suffer and struggle. This is not an authentic religion. Religion is true and authentic, when it makes this world worth living and helps us to march forward to higher and higher realms of our existence. The decree of the Vatican Council II on *The Church in the Modern World* warns the faithful followers of the Church against the rise of atheism for which the believers themselves may be responsible:

> Yet the believers themselves frequently bear some responsibility for this situation. For, taken as a whole, Atheism is not a spontaneous development but stems from a variety of causes, including a critical reaction against religious beliefs, and in some places against the Christian religion in particular. Hence believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of Atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, to teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.[3]

Time and again, religionless movements have tried to replace religion by their ideologies. Marxian communism is perhaps the champion among them.

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[2]Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975, 39.
[3]Vatican II, *The Church in the Modern World*, §19.

Since the 19th century, religions, including Christianity, did not adequately respond to the agony of the suffering masses; accelerated through industrial revolution, Marx sought a solution for this predicamental situation outside the realm of the Church. Here faith in the supernatural was replaced by faith in reason and in the dignity of the human. The study of sacred scripture was replaced by the social analysis of the structure of the human society and its economic power-centeredness. The meditative, personal realization of one's faith was replaced by the collective action programme of the oppressed masses. In short, religion was replaced by secular ideology.

It was years later that Russia, where the traditional grip of religion was very strong and the suffering of the poor masses very enormous, accepted this philosophy as the political ideology of the erstwhile USSR.

3. Religion and Ideology

Paul Tillich, in his work *Christianity and World Religions*, calls the secular ideologies *quasi-religions*.[4] This means that ideologies to a certain extend answer the challenges of the time and meet the needs of humanity in its living context. The commitment to an ideology is some way comparable to one's commitment to a religion. In fact, quite often, we find a deeper and genuine commitment in many a great-minded secular ideologue. This reminds me of the days Jawaharlal Nehru spend in his prison cell, though he would have lived a glamorous life in the outside world, if he opted for that and gave up his campaign for the freedom of the Indian people.

Nehru was not extraordinarily religious; nor was he anti-religious. He was a liberal, secular ideologist. However, though blessed with wealth and learning, he preferred to remain in his prison cell, with tiny creatures and reptiles, for the sake of freedom and welfare of his people. When a secular ideologue pushes forward his ideal he is not sure whether he will be crowned with success. As everyone else, he too is in agony of realizing the envisaged vision in the future. As Albert Camus, in his book *The Rebel*, writes:

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[4]Paul Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1964, 5.

> Who is a rebel? A rebel is a person who, after many years of search and struggle, comes to a final decision that this situation cannot continue any longer. But the rebel too thinks whether he is justified! He feels that in the long run his position is somehow justified.[5]

Karl Marx was an anti-religious ideologue. But the suffering he had to undergo and the price he had to pay for his ideology was very high. He was expelled from his own country on the grounds that he disturbed peace. Escaped to France, remaining committed to the same ideology, he was again expelled from France on the same grounds of disturbing peace. Marx left France and took refuge in England where he wrote his famous work *The Capital*.

Many secular ideologues are very sincere in their vision and commitment. They become a-religious or anti-religious. The background in which they were born and bred, the education they received and the religion at work among them, all influenced the making of a secular ideologue. It might be said that, to a great extend, we all are responsible for the making of our companions and their ideologies.

4. Difference between Religion and Ideology

Ideology is a goal-oriented vision to be realized in this world, within an immediate future. On the contrary, religion is an ultimate and all pervading value of life with its inherent relatedness to the trans-temporal. Religion focuses on the things pertaining to the next world while ideology lays emphasis on the things of this world. Thus, an ideologue will demand justice and reasonable wage from the employer and is ready to fight for it. The religionist, on the other hand, may fail to see the real misery of the people, because of his or her emphasis on the supernatural. This does not mean that a decent human living is outside the range of religious vision and attention. It only means that religion is ready to give a spiritual strength to overcome the physical anomalies of life. Similarly, religion fosters faith in God's transcendence and power whereas ideology trusts in human dignity and creativity. This is the reason why secular ideologies have more appealing programmes to create a new society with a promising future. Religion preaches the kingdom of God and ideology works for the immediate realization of a welfare state. The truth is that the kingdom of

[5]Albert Camus, *The Rebel*.

God which religion preaches has already begun on earth, as Christ himself says. It is the duty of every true religion to see that this kingdom is really operating in this world, with its spiritual power and temporal concerns. Religion gives great importance to God's plan of action and asks the faithful to accommodate themselves to the providential arrangements of events. But ideologies believe in human action and target-oriented programmes. The tension between providence and human planning is to be solved with a responsible mind characterized by a filial trust in the Lord and genuine interest in human development. Neither abstract religious ideal – not in touch with real life on earth – nor an indulgence in worldly success alone is an ideal to be followed. What religion wants to emphasize is this balance of life. But while it stresses this value it may miss the counter value of the liberation of the oppressed. While religion extols the spiritual power the ideology depends heavily on mind power. Hence, ideology comes forward with a rigorous social analysis. When religion proposes and encourages acts of charity in favour of the oppressed, ideology demands justice and equality for all. In fact, these differences are matters of emphasis differently placed. Both religion and ideology stand for the prosperity of the people. Both may fail to have a comprehensive vision of the society and this results in divergent emphasis of values and action programmes. A dialogue between true religion and authentic ideologies are always welcome.

5. Religion and Secular Ideologies

It is obviously clear that every authentic religion is meant to liberate its believers from the clutches of unjust structures and from the bondages of unholy desires. Religion can, however, become oppressive when it imposes on the simple faithful heavy material laws and prescriptions, especially those that stand to the advantage of the rich and the powerful. This calls us to make a distinction between the religion of the poor and of the rich. The rich often look at their religion as a reward for their endeavour in this world. They even consider their works to amass wealth and property as sacrifices and services to the people. On the contrary, the poor and the oppressed look at their religion as a consolation for their suffering due to the inordinate power structure in the society. If this is true, both rich and the poor are enslaved by their own way of looking at religion, the rich enslaved by their own puffed up ego and the poor by the

oppressive structures that the reigning ego (of the rich) has set up for others. Several prophets repeatedly come up at this juncture of religious history and condemn the misuse of religion and religious power for the benefits of the rich and the powerful. Jesus himself is an excellent exemplar of this.

> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel (Mt 23:23-24).

Jesus was a critique of religion. But hardly we see Jesus criticizing other religions. The few comments he made about other religions were in praise of the deep faith he witnessed in the believers of non-Jewish religion. Thus, he extolled the faith of the Roman centurion and exclaimed: "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such a faith" (Lk 7:9). Jesus was, however, a severe critique of his own religion. So he did not approve the self-justifying understanding of religion by the Jewish religious leaders of his time and questioned them firmly and uncompromisingly. To the religious elite of his society Jesus clearly said: "On the outside you appear good to everybody, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and sin" (Mt 23:28). Seeing the oppressed masses he said: "they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mk 6:34). Further, he narrates the divergent attitudes of these two classes of people. "Look, he said, two men went to pray, a Pharisee and publican." Then, Jesus describes their prayer. The Pharisee praised God for himself being an elite of the society, for having blessed him with riches of this world that he could pay the tithes and other gifts to the temple, that he could fast once a week after his sumptuous meals every day. The publican, who was unacceptable in the society, because he was collecting tax for the Roman Empire, with a spontaneous awareness of unworthiness and simplicity, earnestly pleaded God that he would be accepted by his merciful God, though he is unacceptable in the society. Jesus concluded: "I tell you the tax collector and not the Pharisee was right with God when he went home" (Lk 18:14). The elite who sees his high status as a reward from God should scrutinize his thinking and see whether it is really so, or whether it is the accumulated result of the exploitation of the poor and the marginalized. In fact, the religionist will basically agree

with the ideologue that the masses are not objects of the historical forces, but the subjects of the historical processes.

No human being is ever an 'object' of some others' exploitation or satisfaction. All sorts of objectifying (looking at a person as an object) of a human being is sin, whether it be in prostitution, where woman is looked upon as an object of pleasure, or in slavery where the humans are looked upon as machines of cheap production and profit. The human is always an inalienable subject, a unique person, basically equal to every other human being, be it his master, Lord, Bishop or King. This dignity, which ultimately points to the hidden jewel of divinity in the human, makes his works and services infinitely rich, not to be bought by money, but something freely rendered for a common development, in appreciation of which the employer shares part of his wealth with him or her for a humane and decent living. Seen from this perspective religion need not be in any way against a human ideology even if its tenets are secularly worded, nor can ideology be against religion, though religiously worded. But often we see that religion and secularism have pitched their tents in opposing camps. This is partly because the failure of religion to look into the socio-economic and political factors of life and the contemporary movements which give shape to them and also partly because of the one sided thrust of secularist ideologies which oppose and even eradicate religion.

Jawaharlal Nehru who believed in religionless secular ideology for the progress of India later confessed his change of mind and said that a secular ideology should not leave the humans in a spiritual vacuum. What we learn from this is that the inner principle of ideological or religious claims need not necessarily be mutually opposing. It happened to be so only on accidental reasons. Mahatma Gandhi was well aware of this fact. Even in the height of his ideological war against the British Empire in India, Gandhi was careful not to alienate people of India from their deep religious sense. Instead, he combined religion and prayer very well with his political agitation for freedom and independence of India. The international English weekly *Time* has acknowledged Gandhi as the man of the millennium and also salt-*satyagraha* march which Gandhi lead in

protest against the British rule as one of the greatest event of the millennium.[6]

The freedom movements in almost all colonies in Africa and Latin America were largely anti-religious, because the social ideologues did not expect much help from those religions which were, in fact, reigning the country. They also identified the religious power with the power of the elite who were controlling the economy of the nation. Thus, they became anti-Christian. It was a great exception in India's freedom movements that, under the eminent leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the movement ever remained religiously characterized and was never anti-religious. On the contrary, Gandhi appealed to the religion of the masses, convoked prayer meetings, and channelled the force of prayer and human dignity together into the ultimate cause of India's political liberation. Nehru, too, though he did not share very much in the religious enthusiasm of Gandhi, was never anti-religious, but was open to give free expression to the religion of the masses, whom he wanted to liberate from the slavery of the foreign rule. These examples, which were also historically successful, invite us to look afresh to the essence of religion and ideology.

Religion is an ultimate and all pervading value of life with its inherent relatedness to the trans-temporal. It is an "ultimate concern," as Paul Tillich maintains. It is also an all-pervading value of life, that is, we cannot exclude any action or value of a person from his religion. These values are not limited to the realities of this world alone, but has always an inherent reference to something beyond, ultimately leading us to the Beyond and the Boundless.

In contrast to the above-mentioned understanding of religion, ideology can be defined as a goal-oriented vision of life well targeted to be realized in this world, within an immediate future. Ideology is not simply a vision to be relished in the air without the agonizing pain of realizing it here and now. This world is to be transformed in the light of the ideals we perceive and for which we stand determined. Hence, the ideologists have programmes to be worked out immediately and task forces for the same purpose. The real tension is not between the ideal envisaged, but the time gap between the present and future state of things. In fact, religion too

[6] *Time*, January 1, 2000.

demands a change of the present world in the light of the ideal envisaged. The only point the religionists keep emphasizing is that the perfect realization of the ideal will be obtained only in the world to come. According to the Christian perspective, for example, *the kingdom of God which Jesus preached is to be realized here and now as a world of selfless love and service to one another, though the fullest and spotless realization of this is not possible on this earth, as long as we humans are imperfect.* The struggle to create a more human and holy world, however, should continue everyday as long as we are alive on this earth. Religionless ideologies emerge as a living challenge when religions fall short of this striving for the ideal, relegating it to be something realizable only in the world to come. The answer for this challenge is neither a flat denial of the ideology nor of religion, but a penetrating look into the inner essence of both, where both religion and ideology meet and merge.

Religion vs. Ideology

Religion	Ideology
1. Related to the next world	1. Related to this world
2. Faith in God's transcendence and power	2. Faith in human dignity and creativity
3. Search for the kingdom of God	3. Search for a welfare state
4. Trust in God's plan of action	4. Trust in human action programme
5. Extols spiritual power	5. Depends heavily on mind power
6. Prone to acts of charity and generous self-giving	6. Bent on demanding justice and equality

6. The Secular Ideologies of Our Time

Drawing inspiration mainly from the Marxian analysis several leftist political parties have come to exist all over the world and many of them have their offshoots in India. They are CPI, CPM, CPML and other

socialist parties. In this article we are not going into the details of each of them. The mainstay of their thinking can be summarized as follows:

1. A perceptive reading of historical processes that create unjust power structures in this world and impose them on the powerless for the benefit of the few.
2. A careful and meticulous social analysis to unveil the under-currents of these historical processes that brought us into this present situation.
3. An uncompromising demand for transformation of values and re-distribution of world's wealth for the making of a just and egalitarian society.

7. Religious Ideology as a Political Phenomenon

We have begun this article with the narration of an incident, the *rath yatra* to Ayodhya. This was mentioned in the beginning to call our attention to the current situation in India and elsewhere. More and more nations, especially in the Muslim world, are moving from democracy to theocracy. Inspired by that, the Hindus in India are also on a similar move of establishing a Hindu India where the religion of the majority will be declared the religion of the country. This is a recent phenomenon as far as India is concerned, and points to the overwhelming growth of a religious ideology with a great political ambition. Here ideology and religion positively coalesce and this fusion brings about a lot of confusion as well as genuine suspicion to those who do not belong to the religion of the majority but live in the country. This combination of religion and political ideology can win followers as far as it promises a politically bright future for them. In a country of high degree of secularisation it will not work successfully. But as I mentioned, in many Muslim countries and perhaps, as being witnessed now in India, it may have a so-called temporal success.

8. The RSS/BJP Ideology in Religion and Politics

Today India is governed by a Hindu majority party, the BJP, in coalition with other minor parties. This is the upper crust of a long time brooding of Hindu nationalism in the minds of many a high caste Hindu. The roots of this feeling goes back to pre independent India. The British, taking a safe stand for their political ambition, left the religion in India practically untouched and unfostered. The religion was left aside in favour of a secular world, which, they thought, would guarantee their reign for a

longer period of time. The British-educated Indian intellectuals largely participated in this view of secular, political government which is a-religious (not anti-religious), and thought that this will be ideal for a country of many faiths and religious sects. When India became independent, and later a Republic, this ideal was integrated into the constitution and India was declared a secular state, meaning that in India no religion has any preference or any ban whatsoever. It meant that all are free, all are equal, and all are welcome to participate in the common culture of variety and beauty. This ideal was not satisfactory for the Hindu 'elite' who thought that the Hindu ideals must be highlighted in the life of every Indian citizen.

In course of time the Hindu dynamism of this intellectual wave was finally articulated by V. D. Savarkar in his famous book Hindutva, in 1923. Savarkar's Hindutva was not an isolated voice. It represented a widespread feeling, an enthusiastic self-assertion of a group of people to overcome the socio-religious threats they faced from other religions, the Muslims and the Christians, for example, and religionless secular movements such as the communist. Savarkar pleaded for a united Hindu nation, which would eventually be ruled by a Hindu government. Two years later, in 1925, a revolutionary socio-religious association was founded for Hindus under the name *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, who was the president of this association during 1925-1940. The ideal envisaged was a Hindu theocratic national unity instead of a a-religious secular unity of all who live within the geographical boundaries of India as promoted by the All India Congress, an Indian organization which took the lead in the freedom struggle against the British rule. This group of people thought that the secularism of Nehru and the Western trained Hindu 'elite' could not achieve the objective they have in mind and, thus, could not respond to the religious pride and quest of many high caste Hindus in India. Their claim was based on *majoritarianism*, a political state based on a religious majority. Instead of the secular nationalism of the then popular political leaders, they demanded a cultural nationalism of Hindu India where culture of the nation as a whole was practically identified with the religious culture of high caste Hindus. The speedy spread of RSS all over India in a short period of time shows that these sentiments were shared by many Hindus at that time. But the promoters of this movement did not then realize that

governing a multi-religious country with a Hindu theocratic reign would be very difficult. They did not also understand the inner nature of democracy in which majority is not a given fact before the parliament is constituted, but is something to be made in the parliament based on principles applicable to all citizens. In course of time, when the BJP, a close associate of RSS, came to power they were forced to mitigate the cultural nationalism of Hindu India and presented a more inclusive stand in which cultural nationalism included also other faiths and religions with a basic commitment to what is genuinely Indian ethos and culture, irrespective of religiosity as such.

RSS/BJP Ideology +Politics

= Roots in pre-independent India

= The Nehruvian secularism and the Hindu pride of religious tradition

= V. D. Savarkar's *Hindutva*, 1923

= RSS founded by K.V. Hedgewar in 1925 (President: 1925-1940)

= Madhav Sadashiv Gowalker

(RSS President: 1940-1973)

(Book: *We, Our Nation Defined*)

"Non-Hindus do not have citizen rights"

= B. S. Doeres: Next President

(Book: *Doeres Answers Questions*)

"Non-Hindus are outside the ambit of Hindu nation"

= Balraj Madhot: First President of Janasangh

(Book: *Indianization: What, Why and How?*)

"The Religion of the majority must be the Religion of the State"

= BJP, the successor of Janasangh invokes "Cultural Nationalism," i.e., Hindu Nationalism in which Ayodhya becomes the Symbol

9. A Critical Review of Hindutva Ideology

The adherents of RSS and, later, of BJP have tactically proposed Hindutva as a patrimony of India's cultural nationalism. Savarkar made a distinction between Hindutva and Hinduism. Hindutva was considered to be a common denominator unifying all sections of Hindu community including Sikhs and Buddhists, all religions which had their origin from the Indian soil. Hinduism, according to him, is only a part of Hindutva, which is eternal and all pervading. This may sound wonderful if Hindutva is understood as the Indian genius and its basic non-denominational religiosity in which all religions participate. But, according to the promoters of Hindutva ideology, Hindus are not simply any Indian living in the country, but only those prominent ones who inherit the blood of the Vedic fathers:

> All residents of India are not Hindus, for the Hindus are not merely the citizens of the Indian state because they are united not only by the bonds of the above of the love they bear to common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood. All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers, the Sindhus.[7]

Moreover, Hindutva has two dimensions, cultural and political. In the cultural heritage Hindutva ideology is a continuation and perpetuation of the Aryan line of Sanskrit culture. In the political arena, it is rise and reign of the Hindu political consciousness, its struggles and ambitious plan to wield and exercise political power over the whole nation. In his second book, *Glorious Epochs*, Savarkar outlines the Hindu attempts to liberate the country from foreign rules. Once again, concerted effort is being made to identify Hindutva with Hindu religion. In fact, he had a different and more universal outlook in his pre-*Hindutva* thinking, for example, when he wrote *War of Indian Independence*. Here he beautifully describes how inter-religious harmony was the ethos of the pre-independent India.

> The five days during which Hindus and Mohammedans proclaimed that India was their country and that they were all brethren, the days when Hindus and Mohammedans unanimously raised the flag of

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[7]V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, First published 1909, New Delhi: 1970 edition, cited in Panikar, *Communal Threat and Secular Challenge*, xi.

> national freedom at Delhi. Be these grand days ever memorable in the history of Hindustan.[8]

The Hindutva ideology proposed and worked out by Savarkar is further interpreted and developed by the Hindu ideologues. M. S. Golwalkar, the next president of RSS from 1940-1973, defines Indian nation as a Hindu *Rashtra* (a Hindu political state). India is seen as a tree with the heterogeneous appearance. Golwalkar, however, maintains that it is the same life sap that flows through all its branches and leaves.

> The national life of Bharat is an ancient one. The social life here has been woven round a cultural tradition imbued with common life-ideals stemming out of a common comprehensive life philosophy. This has been a living tradition since ages, well before the Islamic and Christian invaders stepped on this soil. The thread of internal unity has never snapped in spite of apparent destruction and dissensions among castes, creeds, sects and even political kingdoms. The human group which has been expressing this unified current of life has been popularly known as the 'Hindu'. The national life in Bharat is therefore the Hindu National life.[9]

The religio-cultural nationalism as advocated by Savarkar and Golwalkar, thus, takes us to the formation of a Hindu communalism, which is fundamentalist in nature. A closed, Aryan, blood-based Hindu community is envisaged as the ideal people of India. This calls for vehement criticism from different parts of the country. First of all, the vast majority of the Indian people, living in remote villages and tribal belts do not know what Sanskrit or Vedic culture is. Their religion, their gods, their worship patterns are entirely different from the Aryan tradition which is prominently present in the Hindutva ideology. Moreover, they are very likely the first inhabitants of India. If they are excluded, Hindutva can never embrace the heart of India. It will be only a wishful desire of a few upper-caste Hindus cherishing the Brahmin superiority over all other people of India. On the other hand, the initial Aryan domination of the northwest provinces of India had its cultural emanations to many other

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[8]V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, cited in Panikar, *Communal Threat and Secular Challenge*, xiii.

[9]M. S. Golwalkar, *We, Our Nation Defined*, cited in Panikar, *Communal Threat and Secular Challenge*, xiv.

parts of India. In the same way, the Aryan culture with its Sanskrit heritage, supposedly migrated to this country from Middle East was also deeply influenced by the then existing Mohan-jo-daro culture, which is definitely non-Aryan. R. C. Zaehner, in his book *Hinduism*, says:

> Much that is typical of 'classical' Hinduism derives not from the invading Aryans, but from indigenous populations they conquered.[10]

This means that the religion of the pre-Aryan people in Indus Valley 'conquered' the religion of the Aryans who came to India later. The excavations of Harappa and Mohan-jo-daro show us the figures of a *yogi* in meditation surrounded by cows and damsels. Yoga and *linga* worship were religious traditions of this non-Aryan community, which have entered into the blood of the Aryan stream of cultural nationalism in India. Though these hypotheses could be discussed, we cannot brush them aside, unless we present other reliable arguments based on research and excavations.

On the other hand, we have to understand that the Hindu revivalism sponsored by RSS and BJP is a legitimate protest against the humiliations and the ill treatment suffered by the foreign rulers of this country who belong to non-Hindu religions. Hindus thought that followers of other religions, which are more aggressive in character, are exploiting the religious tolerance that was the common patrimony of native religions in India. Though this aggressive character was totally against the core of any religion, obviously the then foreign rulers of India did not care very much for it. Hence, the wounded pride of educated Hindus fomented to give rise to the formation of a Hindu self-defence movement. This resulted in the emergence of RSS, and later the political party BJP.

As a political party, religiously characterized, BJP is a combination of religious idealism and political ideology. Mixing religion with politics is harmful to any religion in the world. In all such cases the political leaders misuse their religion for political advantages, no matter what religion they belong to. Hence, the world consciousness slowly moves to secular indifference to all religions in matters of political power and government. To reduce religion to a pure political ideology, to be realized

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[10]R. C. Zaehner, *Hinduism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, 16.

on this earth within a limited period of time, will do only violence to the sane principles of any religion, in order to reap greater political advantage for the immediate future. This is the greater threat to Hinduism than any other threat it faces from outside.

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ACADEMICS COMPOUNDING HINDUTVA

M. Sivaramkrishna•

'Hindutva' exists in two major contexts: the first consists of academic studies, in and from the 'West', regarding virtually every aspect of Hinduism. To this category belong also, collateral studies in India deriving, by and large, from the frames used by the western scholars. The second context is the perennial philosophical tradition of Hinduism consisting of both the *sruti* and the validation of its truths (or Truths) by the nearly unbroken chain of sages and saints right from the Vedic seers down to Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharshi, and more recently Nisargadatta and others. The paradox is that the first category has little to do with the second. For many reasons, the main one constituted by the experiences of these seers is regarded, in the eyes of the academics, teleological and highly subjective.

The politics of 'Hindutva' vis-à-vis Hinduism arises from the tension between these two. That is, whether you call it the secular-democratic or the populist, often militant forces, 'Hindutva' and the hardening of its stance(s) arises from the nearly irreconcilable nature of these two categories. To be more specific: behind the populist trends, there is also the support, tacit or explicit, of many intellectuals, etc. As Jyotirmaya Sharma puts it, "What further complicates the picture is the complicity and collaboration of refined intellectuals, artists and scientists with extremism of the Hindutva variety."[1]

I don't think this is complicity. For, the studies of various aspects of Hinduism, for instance, coming from noted university presses like Chicago, Oxford, California, New York, even Harvard and Princeton, are intellectually impeccable but seem to be highly insensitive to a religion

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[1]Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*. New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2003, 3.

and culture which continued to be something woven into the intricate threads of life itself. Faith in tradition is entrenched either consciously or unconsciously. If the facets of this tradition are brushed aside as not worthy of consideration in academic discussions, what results is the situation which we have now, the emergence of which is imperceptible.

Though it is naïve to generalize and simplify, one can safely say that western writers regard India as a good copy that sells well and fast, especially if its alleged Hindu aberrations are highlighted. India, at one extreme, is portrayed as an area of darkness, a wounded civilization full of heat and dust, ugly, corrupt, inefficient; in fact, this is the impression that most travel writers and the modern electronic media give. They make fun, for instance, of the cow citing the diseased specimens on the road as exemplars of the sacred! If a creative writer parodies the concept of the Divine Mother in the caricature of a story like "How I became the Holy Mother" how is one to respond? Can any one lap it up as creative freedom of the artist?

II

Of late, a more explosive academic assault is on '*Tantra*', one of the most important schools of Hindu spirituality. Disregard the popular aberrations, resulting from New Age practitioners cluttering the websites in which the basic tenets of Hindu faith are subjected to grotesque caricature. What about the scholarly tomes that come from 'responsible' university presses?

Studies by Jeffrey J. Kripal, Wendy Doniger and, of late, Hugh B. Urban, on *tantra*, in general, and of Bengal, in particular, seem to start with the unquestionable assumption that *tantra* is refined sex or that at least it offers a way out of the intolerable conflict between sexual repression and the traditional religious views. One can hardly question their scholarship – at least, as defined by the West. Analytical, empirical, textual exactness marks these studies. Yet, what does one make of statements such as the one made by Hugh B. Urban? Pointing out the support for his study, Urban observes:

> Borrowing some insights from Michel Foucoult and his work on sexuality in the Victorian era, I will argue that *Tantra* has by no means been repressed or marginalized; on the contrary, like sex itself, *Tantra* has become the subject of an endless proliferation of

> discourses and exploited as "the secret." Indeed, one might say even that *Tantra* represents the ideal religion for contemporary western society.[2]

He continues stating his reason: "A religion that seems to combine spirituality with sensuality, and mystical experience with wine, women and wealth, *Tantra* could be the ideal path for spiritual consumers in the strange world of 'late capitalism.'" See the genealogy of the study: Foucoult, Victorian era, "the secret," combining sexuality/sensuality, etc., for, specifically late American (globalizing) capitalism. Wine, wealth and women, perhaps, are transfigured *panchamakaras* of the Tantric ritual. This is the framework that fixes figures like Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo. (Of course, it is not necessary to cite Osho.) In terms of these criteria, an authority on *Tantra* like John Woodroffe and even Swami Vivekananda constitute "deodorized *tantra*" with its implicit "Sex, scandal, secrecy."[3]

Take again, the work of Wendy Doniger. One of her books is called *Bed Tricks*, and it treats of the amorous exploits of Siva and Parvati, among other gods. She also wrote an article which she titled as "When a *Lingam* is Just a Cigar: Psychoanalysis and Hindu Sexual Fantasies."[4] Explaining how a scholar should avoid taking into account what a symbol means for the native, she points to the "hermeneutics of suspicion":

> The hermeneutics of suspicion – the belief that a text can mean something other than what the author thinks it means, a hermeneutic derived directly from Freud – prevents us ... from simply asking members of the culture what they think the symbol means. Many Hindus, for instance, will argue that the *lingam* has nothing whatsoever to do with the male sexual organ, an assertion blatantly contradicted by much of the material ... the gloss offered from within the culture must be accepted as a truth, but only a partial truth. We must also find other, more indirect cultural contexts, such as the

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[2]Hugh B. Urban, *Tantra: Sex Secrecy, Politics and Power in the Study of Religion*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003, 2-3.

[3]Urban, *Tantra*, 134.

[4]See Vaidyanthan T. G. and Jeffrey J. Kripal, ed., *Vishnu on Freud's Desk: A Reader in Psychoanalysis and Hinduism*. Delhi: OUP, 1999.

> patterns formed by other myths, or the rituals associated with the myth, or other evidence of how the myth is used in society.[5]

So, the Hindu who reads this kind of analysis should accept that a *lingam* and a good cigar should be regarded as interchangeable! Then the Hindu text is rescued from "its partial truth" nature. Given these modalities, "Siva is the castrated father and Indra the unhappy oedipal child."[6] By such violent transplanting, no offence is meant! Only an honest attempt at total interpretation is intended. If the argument is paraphrased in the regional languages and given wider circulation for its ingeniously fresh approach to the Hindu myth, how will it be received? We are not talking here of politics but the sheer insensitivity, if not crudity, of the minds that offer such readings, to the "average" Hindu consciousness who may not operate on partial or complete truths but on received traditions of the sacred.

III

The complicity of some intellectuals for Hindutva is rooted in precisely the hermeneutics of suspicion not of the text but of the motives behind such interpretations as Doniger's. It is perhaps indefensible to say it but needs saying. These are symptoms of the spiritual malaise that infects western intellectuals. Their postmodern pretensions seem to me just that: pretension. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain the omniscience which they claim in understanding Hindu texts, Hindu sages (for that matter, all that constitutes, for them, the Other).

It is often said that Hindus cannot take criticism in their stride. That secularists have the right to "deconstruct" every text in terms of current critiques and if the Hindus feel offended, it shows only their intolerance of dissent. Admitted, should one remain passive when even a figure like Ramakrishna is seen as grist for the academic mill? Jeffrey J. Kripal is a notable example: he never seems to be sensitive to the feelings of devotees: not just Hindus but even those in the West who found Ramakrishna to be a peer of Christ.

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[5]Wendy Doniger, "When a *Lingam* is Just a Cigar: Psychoanalysis and Hindu Sexual Fantasies," in Vaidyanthan and Kripal, ed., *Vishnu on Freud's Desk*, 119.

[6]Doniger, "When a *Lingam* is Just a Cigar: Psychoanalysis and Hindu Sexual Fantasies," 296.

Piecing together passages which he says were wantonly suppressed by Nikhilananda, the translator (of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*), he arrives at, according to him, the suppressed "secret" of the exalted figure's alleged homosexuality. In short, Kripal wants to convince the reader of his book that the great figure was troubled by his incapacity to consummate his practice of *Tantra* by the fifth 'M'! Throughout the book, translations are produced which with a little text torturing can be made to look like titillating erotica. Indeed, every psychological aspect is seen through the lens of childhood fantasies so that even Ramakrishna "turning" to Kali is interpreted as the inevitable response to the death of his father! Even when a Swami like Tyagananda exposed the text torturing that Kripal is obviously good at, Kripal does not care to concede it, except superficially.

Article after article, if not book after book, continues to echo Kripal without even an iota of sensitivity about what the Hindus feel. Hugh B. Urban, for instance, commends Kripal's daring: "Going still further ... Kripal makes the more daring argument that much of the root of the saint's intense ambivalence about Tantric sexuality was his conflicting feeling about his own sexual orientation – specially the homoerotic impulses and desires which, Kripal suggests, recurred throughout the saint's life and manifested themselves vividly in his intense mystical experiences." So far, perhaps, one can think of this as an argument. But then Urban is much more daring and goes a step further, in asserting that "Tantric practice requires that the *sadhaka* become a masculine hero and engage in ritual sexual intercourse."[7] Of course, no one can ask which Tantric practice, who is a *sadhaka* and, moreover, is Ramakrishna a person to be analyzed in the frames of an ordinary *sadhaka*. Even if we concede the argument, didn't Ramakrishna declare such practices as "the latrine door entry"? If, therefore, he refuses to enter through that, if it makes him less of a hero, many would feel amen to that!

Whatever the argument, Kripal got his award from the American Academy of Religion. In short, academies do not make any concession to the deep hurt that the alleged brilliance of a book occasions to people of other faiths. Perhaps, since the American scholars have debunked and discredited Christ himself in many books and the American filmmakers are at pains to show the passion of Christ and a group of scholars (behind the

[7]Urban, *Tantra*, 151-52.

Mel Gibson film "The Passion of Christ") raise questions about the sheer naiveté of Christ's suffering ("I can't see why Jesus Christ had to suffer the way he did. But Christ has to die," says David Grey, one of the brainstomers),[8] it is too much to expect them to care for the name of Ramakrishna and the deep wound books like Kripal's inflict on a predominantly faith-based Hindu believer.

In the same vein, we have renderings from Telugu composer Kshetrayya's songs, and the title of the book is *When God is a Customer*. Even here there are interesting twists and turns of logic and argument: "One might even argue that the god's persistent betrayals, his constant affairs with other women, are felt to be an integral and necessary part of the love bond..." Thus, when God becomes a customer (looking for a courtesan or, in our idiom today, "a call-girl") "we have a cycle completed, initial love sexually realized, leads to the lover's loss of interest or temporary disappearance, and to his affairs with other women."[9] The language is contemporary: affairs, betrayed love ... and slightly more sophisticated than an average pornographic magazine.

All this appears as if I have distorted and disfigured the great sophistication and scholarship behind such writings. I may also be accused of lifting citations that suit me. All this I can take. What I cannot take is: Hindu texts being subjected to western textual traditions of a post-modern variety as the sole evaluative tools. Don't these books (I mean, the religious writings) exist in their own indigenous traditions of hermeneutics, texts, exegetical apparatus, language and narrative nuances? Is there no need to give some credibility to those traditions? When a Hindu text is put in the context of the western ethos, should the logic of the secularised societies be the sole arbiter? Should we always believe the localized western paradigms as the irrefutable universal norms, taken for granted as inviolate?

To my mind, the populist Hindutva, more than a political manoeuvre of saffronisation, is the deep archetypal, most unconscious, response to the wounds inflicted by the emerging western intellectual/religious engagement with India. There is also another reason: for instance, if they

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[8]See *The Hindu* (Friday Review), April 16, 2004, I.

[9]Ramanujan A. K., trans., *When God is a Customer*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 16-17.

go on a rampage when a painter paints a Hindu goddess in the nude, or some on Shivaji denigrates him, the reason is that there is no other way to articulate the feelings. For, as in the USA there are no academic religious studies departments affiliated to universities which look into the matter. That is, there is not a single forum other than the one of violent protest. Our scholars do not have access, by and large, to the vast network of production, distribution and dissemination of their ideas. Moreover, as Swami Tyagananda in an interesting article on "Hindu Studies vis-à-vis Hindu Practice" has noted the following:

> If interpretation is to be based on historical data, it is vital that the data is not manipulated. It is vital that texts are translated honestly and accurately. It is vital that loaded language with its own subtext is not used to bolster a thesis, particularly when it distorts textual evidence.[10]

This raises further questions: what, in fact, is "historical"? The Hindu believes that Rama is no less an incarnation since his story does not confirm to western historical procedures. Similarly, whatever learned scholars both here and there say, Ayodhya, Somanatha and other places are integral aspects of their psychic consciousness. If they are subjected to critiques which pay scant respect to these sensibilities, the stance hardens. As Tyagananda himself puts it:

> It may be argued that academics have the right to freely express their views without being under any obligation to respect the sensibilities of a community. In that case, it must be recognized that neither is the community under any obligation to respect the sensibilities of the academic world.[11]

The strange thing (which is generative of hardening Hindutva) is the scant respect quite a few Indian academics themselves have, by and large, for Hindu sentiments. The assumption is that conceding Hindu sentiments would lead to the tyranny of the majority and the consequent suppression of the pluralistic, secular base. The question whether the reality of a secular state led to the end of colonialism and other imbalances, is, however, not squarely addressed by these intellectuals. If it is Hindu-

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[10] Swami Tyagananda, "Reflections on Hindu Studies vis-à-vis Hindu Practice," in *The Vedanta Kesari*, 91 (January 2004), 23.

[11] Tyagananda, "Reflections on Hindu Studies vis-à-vis Hindu Practice," 24.

Muslim divide here, it is the US-Iraq confrontation disturbingly fomenting in the West. How come democratic, secular states of world stature continue to aid and abet regimes which made short circuit of democracy long ago?

Hindutva's emergence is symptomatic of these anomalies. As Jyotirmaya Sharma says, it is easy and rhetorically impressive to assert that

> The only way to confront Hindutva and it demonic agenda is to privilege the question of legitimacy and call the bluff of a set of self-appointed arbiters of faith. The answer is inherent in the question itself. *Every Hindu decides what is Hinduism. That space ought to remain inviolable. It is a space worth living for and dying for.*[12]

By analogy, then, why not concede that the saffronizing agenda-based individuals voted for the BJP? For, in a democracy each voter, theoretically at least, decides for whom to vote, and each one expects the elected party to carry on his/her agenda. The hypothesized "Hindu living and dying in his inviolable space," is analogically as reductive a specimen as "the demonic" Hindus living and dying for their faith, fighting, in short, for a collective space occupied by debunking academics and demoralized secularists.

The paradox is implicit in the very secular spirit implanted without checks and balances. It works only to worsen the situation. The more the media's bias from reporting to privileging particular perspectives, the more is the hardening of Hindutva. For, it is assumed beforehand, that all others who are not secularists are devils and demons. For example, Jyotirmaya Sharma lumps together Dayanand Sarasvati, Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda, and V. D. Savarkar in his study and declares that they "fabricated a vision of Hindu India and its destiny" that is "terrible and tortured"![13] In this context, perhaps, although all may not agree with T. N. Madan wholly, he is forthright and candid:

> In the prevailing circumstances, secularism in South Asia, as a generally held credo of life is impossible, as a basis for state action impracticable, and as a blueprint of foreseeable future impotent...

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[12]Sharma, *Hindutva*, 13, emphasis added.
[13]Sharma, *Hindutva*, 8.

> Secularism is the dream of a minority which wants to shape the majority in its own image, which wants to impose its will upon history, but lacks the power to do so under a democratically organized polity... From the point of view of the majority, 'secularism' is a vacuous word, a phantom concept, for such people do not know whether it is desirable to privatise religion, and if it is how this may be done unless they be Protestant Christians, but not if they are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs. [In short], Indian secularism achieves the opposite of its stated intentions: it trivializes religious difference as well as the notion of unity of religions.[14]

IV

These are random reflections, perhaps emotive at places, but the conviction I have is firm. I do not consider that studies coming from the West and the ones deriving their interpretive tools from the West are wholly conducive to containing the threat (if at all) of Hindutva. They seem insensitive to the nuances of faith here. Compounded by the fact of wide diffusion, these studies have a thrust and range hard to contain. Specially, the irreverent and smug neo-historical approaches to faith(s) and its texts (highly idiosyncratic in their selection) do not relieve the scene. Along with these, artists (including filmmakers, specially those focusing on the [alleged] plight of women, or the 'Dalits') choosing to caricature Hindu Goddesses, though aesthetically edifying, are politically explosive.

The signals are distinct: unless the *wholly* condemnatory tone regarding Hindutva is neutralized, it has every chance of acquiring support even from those who earlier were sceptical about it. There are few who speak for the battered faith of the Hindus, by the Orientalists, the moderns, the post-moderns and now the 'playboys' of the western academic world.

I am not unaware of the unique contribution a few western scholars have made to the restoration and revitalizing of many aspects of Hindu faith. Sensitive studies are not rare. But, as in the media, the sensational attracts attention effortlessly. Even so, for one Kripal, there are many who enter the heart of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* through the main door, and pluck the mangoes only to eat and not to count their number, judge

[14] T. N. Madan, 289-90

their colour or assess their size, etc. (Perhaps, some wantonly pluck also rotten mangoes, if any appear so). It is Andrew Harvey who declared: "If I had to choose one book to take with me to a desert island to contemplate for the rest of my life, or pick one book to give to a seeker today to help guide him or her into the joys and mysteries of the mystical life it would be ... *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.*"[15]

"As many faiths, so many paths," Ramakrishna declared. One has, however, to check whether one has faith or fickle fetishes mostly academics passing off as faith. In such a case, every other religion serves as a hobbyhorse to be whipped with glee.

[15]Andrew Harvey, "Foreword" *Selections from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, annotated by Kendra Crossen Borroughs. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Path Publishing, 2002, ix.

Journal of Dharma 29, 1 (January-March 2004), 65-72

THE CENTRAL TRUTH OF HINDUISM

A Restatement vis-à-vis Current Controversies over Hindutva

Sanjyot D. Pai Vernekar♦

The closing quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of numerous forms of religious fundamentalism in Asia, in general, and in the Indian subcontinent, in particular. In consequence, the commencement of the twenty-first century had to be characterised by a re-initiation of public debate on the nature, significance and function of religion. As of today, the debate is being carried out as much within India as it is in quite a few other countries of the subcontinent. The contemporary scenario of the debate in India is with reference to so-called Hindutva as the sheet anchor of Hinduism. In view of this, it is quite in place to attempt a re-examination of the current concept of religion, in general, and of the Indian religion, in particular.

In global terms, religion in the social situation of today is being viewed from the perspective of western social scientists. Therefore, religion is related to the structure and process of human societies. After all, social scientists seek to know how religion affects the course of social change. Moreover, major dimensions of religious belief and practice are part of a larger social order today. Even political behaviour is being increasingly influenced by religious group membership, religious belief and religious behaviour.[1] The Indian situation of the last two decades, in particular, bears out that religion has started emphasising beliefs and practices instead of studies of sacred texts and philosophy as used to be undertaken in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. By means of that, each religious group chooses to designate its deepest problems of suffering and injustice, and to specify its most fundamental ways and means of

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[1] *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1987, vol. 26, 538-39.

seeking to resolve the problems. Unfortunately, however, all such efforts made by such religious groups in the contemporary situation are becoming responsible for further increase in suffering and injustice to the respective religious group as also to the global community.[2] Thus, religion has become responsible for all manner of undesirable developments taking place in the Indian subcontinent today.

In the present overall global situation, there is, no doubt, dispute over any acceptable definition of religion. Yet, there is a consensus regarding the need to strive for objectivity with regard to the essential and the typical in religious life or faith, and not with the accidental and the insignificant dimensions. Accordingly, it is being insisted that a good assessment of a given faith must concern itself with the fundamentals of religion. This is specially needed in the case of Hinduism as the major religion of India in view of the latter's identity as a country with a very ancient egalitarian religio-cultural conscience.

In this regard, fortunately, there are already certain ideas and views formed and presented by leading Indian scholars and thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They are worthy of consideration especially because of their abiding influence on, and acceptability to, a large majority of sub-continental Indians. Besides, they are considered as not too much influenced by the western discourse on religion. By and large, they have their own original ideas and constitute the Indianness of their discourse. Above all, their proponents are as diverse as Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sri Aurobindo, S. Radhakrishnan, and Hiriyanna.

Religion in India, according to Swami Vivekananda, is visualised as the awakening of spirituality in man for the purpose of achieving the realization of Divinity. Hinduism, he holds, provides a secure foundation and an ultimate sanction to morality.[3] As such, true Hinduism is different from institutional religions by virtue of being free from all unnecessary limits imposed on it by sects and organised religions.[4] It is above all manner of separatist and disruptive tendencies and universal in all its

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[2]*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 26, 540.

[3]B. K. Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989, 41.

[4]Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, 42.

contents. In it there is no struggle and attempt to believe exclusively in a certain doctrine or dogma since its goal is realisation of the Divine through constant endeavour.[5] It inspires man to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and to become perfect as God.

Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of religion stem from his conviction that truth itself is God and, therefore, sincere pursuit of truth is itself religion. According to him, religion is ordinarily defined as devotion to some higher power or principle. Gandhi considers religion also as the expression of the permanent nature of man. Its permanent aspect is the aspect of Divinity, i.e., the element of essential goodness present in every man. It has, besides, the character of purifying and elevating one's nature. It arouses in man a sense to the right and the good. It inspires him to have a cognitive urge to know "the beyond."[6] In Gandhi's view, Hinduism is an ethical religion and stresses the regard for other religions.[7]

Religion, according to Jawaharlal Nehru, has given to human life a set of values, which provides the foundation of morality and ethics. Some form of the religious belief is, therefore, necessary for the generality of mankind.[8] After all, Nehru opines that religion consists of the inner development of the individual, and the evolution of his consciousness in a direction considered good.[9] Therefore, a true religion is spiritual in nature. By virtue of being spiritual, religion can be the only cure for social evils such as superstition. In its outward form, however, religion is not the same as it is in its inner spirituality. As a result, religions have also tried to imprison truth in set forms and dogmas, and encouraged ceremonials and practices which have become mere routine and, sometimes, redundant. They have preached a philosophy of submission to established structures of religion, and to the prevailing social order. Yet, religions have brought comfort to innumerable human beings and stabilised society by their values. Organised religions, however, are an obstacle in the progress of civilization because they help the exploiters against the exploited.

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[5]T. M. P. Mahadevan and G. V. Saroja, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1983, 109.

[6]Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, 126.

[7]Mahadevan and Saroja, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, 130.

[8]S. Mathur and S. Goyal eds., *Spectrum of Nehru's Thought*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1994, 172.

[9]Mathur and Goyal eds., *Spectrum of Nehru's Thought*, 161ff.

Emphasis on the external forms of religion and neglect of its inner spirit causes much of dishonesty and hypocrisy in the religious life of man. Religion, no doubt, breeds both good and bad. The bad in it, however, encourages reactions like fundamentalism.

Religion in its true form, according to S. Radhakrishnan, is the one thing that strengthens the deeper bonds of ideas and ideals of a civilization's social organization.[10] Recognizing the need of mutual understanding among various religions as an inherent part of Indian religiosity, he writes:

> A religion that is based on the central truth of a comprehensive universal spirit cannot support an inflexible dogmatism. It adopts an attitude of toleration not as a matter of policy or expediency but as a principle of spiritual life. Toleration is a duty, not a mere concession. In the pursuance of this duty Hinduism has accepted within its fold almost all varieties of belief and doctrine and treated them as authentic expressions of the spiritual endeavour... Hinduism warns us that each of us should be modest enough to realise that we may perhaps be mistaken in our views and what others hold with equal sincerity is not a matter of ridicule.[11]

Religion, thus, ensures a strong and stable unity within the organization. It plays an important role in rebuilding the human household as much as science and technology do. Hinduism, for one, glides into love of beauty and order as well as into a spirit of pragmatism. It stands for the perception of the oneness of man with the spirit of truth, love and beauty in the universe. Hinduism recognizes every form of faith as a possessor of some form of truth. It believes in learning the truth not by criticism and discussion but by deepening life and by changing the level of human consciousness. It maintains that God is not merely the highest form to be known but also the highest being to be realized. In India religion is not, as in the West, a mere social phenomenon or a matter of ecclesia. On the contrary, it is the attainment of spiritual freedom as the private achievement of the individual. In general, Hinduism and other Indian

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[10]S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967, 44ff.

[11]A. L. Basham ed., *A Cultural History Of India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975, 70.

religions have a tendency to other-worldliness while this-worldliness is a characteristic of western religions. The Indian religions provide an insight into reality. They promote a way of life, a scheme of metaphysics, not a creed, not a code or a set of dogmas. They tell everyone to worship God according to one's own faith or *dharma*.[12] Radhakrishnan maintains further that the Indian religious discipline consists in turning inwards, deepening one's awareness and developing a more meaningful attitude to life.[13] He concludes that Hinduism, in general, represents the soul of the Indian people, its particular spirit, and its thought and temperament.

According to Hiriyanna, religion may become a yearning of the human spirit for union with God, a reaching forward to an ideal without resting in mere belief or outward observances. It promotes and furthers right living.[14] In Hiriyanna's view, therefore, religion should put an end to every form of hate. It should emphasize the necessity for toleration. It must also see that there is, in what it teaches, nothing that makes for intolerance even indirectly.[15]

As against these explanations and pronouncements on what constitutes the central truth of the Indian religions, the views of Sri Aurobindo form an uncommon and unique discourse. Rightly so because they are based on such variously relevant branches of knowledge as sociology, psychology, evolution of human consciousness and the history of spirituality, and not in anyway on western ideas of religion. Western views are fractional whereas Sri Aurobindo's views are holistic and comprehensive. He says, for example: "Religion is the spiritual and ethical life of the individual, the relations of his soul with God and the intimate dealings of his will and character with other individuals."[16] He further adds that it is that instinct, idea, activity, or discipline in man, which aims

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[12]S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion in a Changing World*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967, 129.

[13]Mahadevan and Saroja, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, 247.

[14]M. Hiriyanna, *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967, 17-18.

[15]M. Hiriyanna, *The Mission of Philosophy*, Mysore: Kayvalaya Publishers, 1960, 39.

[16]Sri Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 25, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997, 458.

directly at the Divine.[17] For Sri Aurobindo, thus, the spiritual essence of religion is alone supremely needful. Spirituality is, in fact, religion's own chief business and true aim as "also the common element and the common bond of all religions."[18] In view of this Sri Aurobindo says that the modern economic man is particularly in need of rediscovering the truth that religion is the spiritual and ethical life of the individual.[19] This aspect of his concept of religion represents the central truth of the Indian religions. With spirituality as its core element, the Indian religions have existed in the Indian subcontinent since the Vedic times. As such, they persuade their believers to follow the path of spiritual consciousness. They also set before all human beings the Divine as the ultimate goal and the aim of their being, together with the aim of the holistic development of the individual and the collectivity.

In tracing the "evolution of the spiritual man," says Sri Aurobindo, Hinduism has always leaned upon spiritual thinking. It has continued to retain spiritual experience as its final aim and achievement.[20] No doubt, it has sometimes pushed away the philosophical element and leaned on creed and dogma, pietistic emotion and fervour, or moral conduct. Nevertheless, its spiritual philosophy has very uniquely been predominant. By highlighting spiritual experience, Hinduism has sought only the pure truth of spirit even to the extent of giving up all religious creed and worship along with ritual practices.

By unravelling the nature and extent of the spirit-oriented nature of the Indian religions, Sri Aurobindo proves that they are holistic and universal in their world-view and God-view unlike the other religions. In his view, it came to be given the name of Hindu religion largely by foreigners. But as a matter of fact, Sri Aurobindo declares that the spirit-oriented religion of India which is *Sanatan Dharma* in the Vedic sense, is the proper religion of India.

> But what is the Hindu religion, ... this religion, which we call *Sanatan*, eternal? It is the Hindu religion only because the Hindu nation has kept it ... in this peninsula... But it is not circumscribed by

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[17]Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 25, 173.
[18]Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 25, 551.
[19]Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 25, 458.
[20]Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970, 860-61.

> the confines of a single country... That which we call the Hindu religion is really the eternal religion, because it is the universal religion which embraces all others. If a religion is not universal, it cannot be eternal.[21]

Employing the term in that broad, non-creedal sense, Sri Aurobindo explicates:

> It is the one religion which impresses on mankind the closeness of God to us and embraces in its compass all the possible means by which man can approach God. It is the one religion which insists every moment on the truth which all religions acknowledge, that He is in all men and all things and that in Him we move and have our being. It is the one religion which enables us not only to understand and believe this truth but to realize it with every part of our being. It is the one religion which shows the world ... that it is the *lila* of Vasudeva... It is the one religion which does not separate life in any smallest detail from religion, which knows what immortality is and has utterly removed from us the reality of death.[22]

It is obvious from such utterances of Sri Aurobindo that for him Hinduism is nothing but the religious culture of humankind as a whole since it seeks to turn the whole of life towards spirituality.[23] In view of this, it makes itself relevant to the changing spirit of the present times too. For, according to Sri Aurobindo, the true Hinduism makes all creedal or dogmatic characteristics irrelevant. In their place it imposes upon the mind of its followers a belief in the highest consciousness or state of existence. Next, it lays upon the individual life the need of self-preparation till man is ready for an effort to grow consciously into the truth of this greater existence. Thirdly, it provides a well-founded way of knowledge as well as a way of spiritual or religious discipline. Lastly, it provides an organisation of the individual and collective life. It lays out, besides, a framework of personal and social discipline and conduct, a system of mental, moral and vital development of the individual by which each individual can become eventually ready for the greater existence. No wonder, therefore, that Sri Aurobindo declares that Hinduism is well qualified to grow into what he

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[21] Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 8, 11.
[22] Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 8, 11-12.
[23] Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 20, 178ff.

conceives as the "spiritual religion of humanity" since it posits and believes in one secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one and declares that the human race and the human being are the means by which the One Reality will progressively reveal itself in this world.

The religious views of Sri Aurobindo imply, above all, a growing attempt to live out this knowledge of the Divine and to bring about a kingdom of this Divine Spirit upon earth.[24] These views of the great Rishi and Yogi need to be borne in mind in the present Indian situation so that the openness and universal outlook that are its hallmarks shall be retained and positively cherished and cultivated for posterity.

[24] Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, vol. 25, 577.

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Reflection

HINDUTVA: WHIPPING UP SLEEPING SLAVES

V. T. Rajshekar[♦]

It is a fact that a micro-minority of about 3% Brahmanical forces had never failed even once in their attempt to defeat and enslave the non-Aryan natives ever since they divided, defeated, destroyed and finally drove Buddhism out of India about 2,500 years ago. By the end of the 10th century, Buddhism was practically stamped out of India.

To them it was success after success. Such was their dedication, devotion and concentration on their mission to establish the "*Brahmin Raj*" which today they have renamed as *Hindutva*. These Brahmanical forces were never interested in their religion or their gods. Their sole interest has been the caste system (another name of Hinduism), which enables the *vaidiks* to lord over this land. They manufactured several 'scriptures' and 'philosophies' with different names. All of them, including Gandhism, Marxism, Socialism, and Hinduism are the means to the same end – that is, casteism.

Ever since the death of Buddhism in India it was a smooth ride for Brahmanism. Neither the Muslim rule nor the British rule came in their way of *Hinduising* (enslaving) the indigenous Bahujans. Its most noteworthy achievement was in renaming the hundred of tribes into castes (*jati*) and then grading them hierarchically into their caste system (*Varnashrama* Dharma), placing the Brahmin at the apex of this caste pyramid. The caste system finally ensured the supremacy of the *vaidiks*.

We have to admit that the *vaidiks* have accomplished a miracle: Rising from the ashes, to which Buddhism once reduced them, they were mysteriously reborn. They regrouped and retaliated with vengeance: hats off to Brahmin patience, perseverance and the love for their *jati*.

♦ **Dr. V. T. Rajshekar,** a prolific writer and one of the most prominent advocates of the Dalit community across the globe, is the editor of *Dalit Voice* and champions, especially, the cause of those segments of the society that are adversely affected by the secular and religious manipulations of the apparently 'religious' forces.

The advent of M. K. Gandhi and his transformation as *Mahatma* was a carefully planned Brahmanical manipulative strategy. The mask of the socialism that he was made to wear was meant to deceive the Dalits, Muslims and Christians.

He deceived the Dalits (Poona Pact), Tribals, the Muslims, Sikhs and Christians and preached "non-violence" to the hungry stomachs but at the same time encouraged upper caste violence. The credit of ushering the *vaidik* rule in *independent* India solely goes to Gandhi and not to today's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It was Gandhi who tried to *hinduise* (enslave) the Dalits, Tribals and Backward Communities. The only person who fought Gandhi in pre-independent India was Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, after Jinnah had left for Pakistan.

Gandhi's Congress ruled the country for 50 long years and ensured the further enslavement of Dalits, Muslims, etc., and at the same time further strengthened the muscles of the overfed upper castes. The Congress Party has no right to criticize the BJP today because Gandhi's Congress itself was India's original Brahmanical party, as Dr. Ambedkar had said.

As long as the Congress party ruled India, the deprived people remained doped and mesmerized: the Dalits and Muslims, the country's two most virile but the worst persecuted sections, were almost totally with the Congress. Like those innocent cows locking the very hand of the butcher leading them to slaughterhouse, these two communities were continuously voting for the Congress and getting slaughtered. Christians too.

The rise of the BJP changed the country's social scene. BJP – completely guided by its secret organization, RSS (*Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh*) – is made out of a different metal. It is a party of "Sacred Brahmins" who are most honest in their words and deeds to the cause of Hindutva. They are not deceptive and double-tongued like Gandhi and his Congress, the party of "Socialist Brahmins."

Between the "Sacred Brahmins" and the "Socialist Brahmins" I would prefer the first one, the "Sacred Brahmins." For, they are hones and straightforward. "Socialist Brahmins" like Gandhi, Nehru, etc., will smile and smile but cut your throat painlessly. The "Sacred Brahmins," however, openly hate you and publicly abuse you. Among these two, who is better? "Sacred Brahmins" are fire-makers; for they burn, loot and murder. The

"Socialist Brahmins" are, on the other hand, fire-fighters: They extinguish the fire. They say they love Dalits, though it is an attempt to slowly poison the same Dalits.

Slaves of India enjoying their slavery for thousands of years need somebody who will whip up the sleeping slaves, push them into a crisis and force them to get up and fight. "Sacred Brahmins," in fact, make the slaves angry and then fight and die for their liberation.

The "Sacred Brahmin" party, the BJP, has routed the "Socialist Brahmin" party of Congress in the last Gujarat Assembly election and later in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, etc. These developments are welcomed as they unmask the real face of Hinduism.

A. B. Vajpayee, the Prime Minister of India, is today what M. K. Gandhi was yesterday. Earlier, the ruling upper castes wanted an expert who could deceive the angry, starving masses and then lull them to sleep. They found an ideal person in Gandhi. Vajpayee, like Gandhi, is the false face of Hindutva to help deceive the Dalits, Muslim, Christians, Tribals and Backward Communities. The "Sacred Brahmins," whom we like for their intellectual honesty, do not agree with Vajpayee's interpretation of Hinduism just as the "Sacred Brahmins" then represented by Godse, Savarkar, Golwalkar, etc., did not agree with Gandhi.

It shows that India's *vaidik* strategy has not changed even a bit since centuries. They do not believe in change, because their religion is called *Sanatana* Dharma which is a never-changing political weapon intended to keep the *vaidiks* as the rulers for ever.

That is why between the "Sacred" and "Socialist Brahmins," we like the former. It is their violent attack on Muslims and Christians that finally made the two "minority" communities angry and revolt against Hinduism for the first time. Until then, both believed the false secularism, which the Congress party was selling all through India.

For the contemporary "Sacred Brahmins" led by Togadia, Narendra Modi, Ashok Singhal etc., and the murder and mayhem they resorted to, however, the Muslims would never have got angry. Should you not thank the 'Sacred Brahmins" for whipping up the Muslims and Christians?

Vajpayee was wrong when he said in his "Goa Musings" that Hindutva did not believe in hatred. Hindutva is top to bottom hatred. Hate

guides a Hindu from birth to death. One Hindu hates the other. Gandhi, who did so much service to Brahmins, was killed not by a non-Hindu but by a great Brahmin leader. Godse was guided by hate. The very purpose of caste system is an ascending order of reverence and the descending degree of contempt. Hate is the essence and kernel of Hinduism.

Buddha had said this, and Dr. Ambedkar repeated it. There is no place for love, justice, equality or respect for the weak in Hinduism. Love is there but only to his *jatwalas*. Might is right; woman is a sex object; the Brahmin has to be the leader even if he is a donkey. This is the Hindu rule. Hinduism is *Sanatana* Dharma, deathless and changeless, and not even a command can be altered. Then, the "Sacred Brahmins" ask: Who is Vajpayee to change it?

No less a person than B. G. Tilak, one of the founding fathers of the RSS, said that Hinduism fully sanctioned violence. *Manu Dharmasastra* sanctioned immediate killing.[1] Vajpayee is using some "Socialist Brahmin" slogans to confuse and then deceive the Dalits, Tribals and Backward Communities who might otherwise revolt against his party just as the Muslims and Christians did when they came to know the truth.

Remember one thing: when Vajpayee speaks some sweet sounding words, it is the RSS, which makes him, say all this to keep the Dalits, Tribals and Backward Communities in good humour. The RSS-BJP cannot afford to antagonize the whole lot of obedient, unpaid, permanent, and loyal slaves of Hindus. The Hindu Nazism can only devour and digest the Dalits, Tribals and Backward Communities (which are bureaucratically identified as SC/ST/BCs) one by one.

They have succeeded in Hinduising (enslaving) the SC/ST/BCs to a great extent and thereby making them hate the Muslims and Christians. That job has been fairly well done. In Ahmedabad, it was the Dalits who attacked and killed the Muslims and caused the Gujarat Genocide-2002. It was the Dalits who climbed up the Babri Masjid and destroyed it in 1992.

The Muslims are still a big force forming 15% of the Indian population. They have international support also; besides, a powerful Pakistan, a nuclear power, is beside India. So, the RSS-BJP can stage only

[1]D. K. Gosavi, *Tilak, Gandhi and Gita*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1983.

a single Gujarat Genocide-2002, but if they repeat it elsewhere, there will be a turmoil and wholesale bloodbath forcing even SC/ST/BCs to turn against them. This fear, in fact, is real and genuine.

They want mainly Dalits with them until they completely "finish" Muslims and Christians. "Finishing" does not mean killing them wholesale, as it does not seem to be possible at all. Such a big number of Muslims cannot be killed. What they will do is try the "Spanish Experiment" of Hinduising the Muslims. The elite Muslims, who often sing the Hindu-Muslim unity song, have been already hinduised (enslaved). Once the Muslims are "finished," the next target is Dalits.

In fact, the *vaidiks* hate Dalits much more than Muslims. The job of "finishing" the Dalits will be expedited when the "Sacred Brahmins" come to power on their own strength. Then only Dalits like today's Muslims will get angry.

"Socialist Brahmins" will continue to deceive the Dalits, mislead them, lull them to sleep and, then, quietly suck their blood in a painless operation. The "Sacred Brahmins," however, resort to open attack, murder and mayhem as they did in Gujarat Genocide-2002, through which the Muslims turned totally against the BJP. If the Dalits have to turn against the RSS-BJP and their Hinduism, the "Sacred Brahmins" of the *Moditva* (named after Narendra Modi) brand of the RSS-BJP must come to power. Then only Dalits will be whipped up from their deep slumber and get angry. We want the Dalits to get angry. The one sure people, to my mind, who are capable of making them angry are the "Sacred Brahmins" and not the "Socialist Brahmins." That is why we should prefer the "Sacred Brahmins."

So, the RSS-BJP combine is going step by step to keep the SC/ST/OBc under their wings. They are not in a hurry. That is why Vajpayee is now and then called upon by the RSS to speak some falsehood to mislead the Dalits and keep them confused. The "Socialist Brahmins" among *vaidiks* are deeply worried that the "Sacred Brahmins' *Moditva*" may rock the boat too much and the boat may sink. That is why they are asking Vajpayee now and then to bluff and mislead the masses so that they will not get angry. In fact, both the "Socialist" and "Sacred Brahmins" have the same goal – establishment of the "*Brahmin Raj*." In doing so, however, the "Socialist Brahmins" are afraid that the situation may go out

of control and the angry masses may identify the hidden enemy who is behind the hate-mongering and social unrest. That is why they are now and then fielding Vajpayee to mislead and bluff.

The 'Modi' had blood in his hand, but Vajpayee has a smile on his face: Vajpayee deceives but Modi provokes. While the 'Vajpayee' smiles and smiles and yet stabs you in the back, the 'Modi' frightens you, angers you, provokes you and forces you to fight. Now, therefore, say who is better: the open, honest 'enemy', or the crooked, dishonest 'friend'?

We can't leave it to the Congress party to fight the RSS-BJP. We can't trust the Congress party any more. It is the party of "Gandhis" and "Nehrus" who deceived us. It is the party which Ambedkar fought life long. The RSS-BJP is more honest. This RSS-BJP can be tackled and defeated only by the Bahujans. None else is better suited for this job than the Dalits, the children of Babasaheb Ambedkar. The real battle will however, begin once the RSS-BJP concludes that they have finished with the Muslims. Then only they will try to tackle the Dalits.

The only person who has made a thorough study of Brahmanism and gave us all the warnings, directions and also weapons is Dr. Ambedkar. He is the model. He has predicted that only the Dalits, the born revolutionaries, will ultimately fight and defeat Brahmanism. The only thing we are waiting for is the moment in time when Dalits will be whipped up from their current deep slumber, made to get angry and then fight to success.

We are waiting for that day when the Hindutva – now modified into *Moditva* – bares its fangs and starts its attack on Dalits who are the blood enemies of Aryan *vaidiks*. Only when such an attack on Dalits begins, they will wake up and fight back. That day is not far off. Once the RSS-BJP tackles the Muslims, the next stage is the Dalits. These Dalits today are in a deep snooze: a sort of coma, in which slaves enjoy their slavery. They have to be whipped up from this deep slumber, which, in fact, will be done by the Modis, Togadias, Advanis, and Bal Thackerays. That is why, in our own interest, the "Sacred Brahmins" are to be supported!

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Literature Survey: 1

MANIPULATIVE SCHOLARSHIP SERVING HINDUTVA

Sebastian Athappilly♦

This is a critical analysis of Sita Ram Goel's book *Jesus Christ: An Artifice for Aggression*, New Delhi: Voice of India, 1994, pages vi + 114.

Aristotle had sensibly pointed out that something is better understood in its causes. Sita Ram Goel's book with its unscholarly, selective approach and its preconceived and forced conclusions betrays the causes that have given birth to it, namely, feelings of hatred and antagonism against Christianity, on the one hand, and those of insecurity and jealousy, on the other, aroused by the growing fascination Jesus exercises on many Hindus. This explains very well the title and the content of the book.

The author is really (but unnecessarily) worried about the positive approach of the many open minded Hindus towards Jesus. The following words in the preface reflect his reaction to it and also explain the setting and purpose of the book. He writes:

> Flattering the bully may become necessary when the bully is powerful and there remains no other way of softening him except by extolling his heroes or his cult. Hindus have experienced such emergencies vis-à-vis both Islam and Christianity. But there is no reason for their continuing with the same psychology (vi).

Is Goel so simple to believe that most of the Hindus today are under the impression that they have to still flatter the Christian bully by loving Jesus? If he really thinks so, it only betrays his poor opinion about his fellow Hindu brethren and this amounts also to an insult to them! His deep concern is reflected in the following pieces of advice to the Hindus: "Most

♦**Prof. Dr. Sebastian Athappilly cmi,** currently the Dean, Faculty of Theology, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, is a renowned systematic theologian (with his specialisation on the theology of Karl Rahner) and contributes regularly to various international theological journals.

Hindus know the story of Raja Nala who made it easy for *Kaliyuga* to enter into him and make him lose his kingdom by showing weakness for gambling. Weakness for Jesus is the same sort of vice" (83). He continues: "It is high time for Hindus to learn that Jesus Christ symbolises no spiritual power, or moral uprightness... There is no reason why Hindus should buy him" (85). All this bears witness to his above mentioned internal unrest and unfounded sentiments behind writing the book. Precisely such a negative and emotionally charged bias makes his book hardly a scholarly work; in fact, it turns out to be a part of the strategy aimed at systematically sowing hatred against other religious minorities in India, especially the Christians and Moslems, as is implied in the following words of the preface, where he addresses his fellow Hindus and writes: "We object to Christian missions, but refuse to discuss Christianity and its God, Jesus. We object to Islamic terrorism, but refuse to have a look at Islam and its prophet, Muhammad" (vi). The suggestion is that it is not enough to merely object to Christian missions and Islamic terrorism; something more has to be undertaken if an effective change is awaited. Curiously enough, Goel has nothing against Hindu missionaries working in the West! The words "Islamic terrorism" also betray his communalistic antipathy.

Goel is definitely uneasy about the Hindu appreciation of Jesus. There is, however, nothing to be alarmed about it. Great men and leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen, Bhavani Charan Banerji, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Swami Vivekananda, Sadhu Sundar Singh, Mahatma Gandhi, etc., were drawn to Jesus Christ and they esteemed him and his teachings very much. Goel's words suggest that they all were foolish and he alone is the wise one. His above quoted sweeping assertion that "Jesus Christ symbolises no spiritual power" (85) is just one example of the prejudice and the poor scientific nature of the book. In addition to this we note that the author conveniently leaves out everything that does not suit his *pre-conceived* (!) conclusion, yet tries to create among the uncritical readers an impression of having made a scientific assessment or a scholarly treatise on the issue. For academic reasons as well as sincere dialogue Goel's book, even after a decade of its publication, needs an answer. It is appreciable that he took the pains and spent much time to study some materials related to the theme.

Goel is very well aware of the damages that could be caused in any scientific study by selectiveness and citations out of context. He is, hence,

very particular to request a certain Mrs. Martin: "My only request is that you will not quote me at random, or selectively, or out of context" (99). The irony, however, is that he himself does not respect this principle of fairness in his treatment of the very delicate issue of Jesus' historicity; instead, he writes without any prick of conscience whatever he finds in his *selected* "scholars" against Jesus and his real existence!

If the publishers (Voice of India, Delhi) and Sita Ram Goel are sincerely against Western culture and patterns of thought (which they fear are being brought by Christianity to India to destroy the Indian culture), one would expect that they are about to launch a vehement attack against Indians doing studies and researches in the West, against television and cinema, against tourism to and from the West, against western books and periodicals, and also against the English language which all *do* bring western culture to our country. Further, one wonders why the entire book, written in English (!), is discussing precisely a *typically western* issue of historicity by employing *purely a western* methodology! The issue of historicity has never been in our country a concern with regard to religious faith, as is manifested in the Hindu faith in the *Avataras*. No one has ever questioned nor made a research about the historical Rama or Krishna, their lives, dates of birth, exact words and deeds, etc. If now, as the book suggests and argues that one's historicity is decided *solely* on the basis of certain *written* records or documents, and that too by those *outside* one's own circle, then the historicity of many a Hindu as well as other personalities would be threatened! Further, no one of us would be then able to defend the historicity of many of our grandparents, rather we would be forced even to *deny* their historicity, simply because we may not have documents about their birth, life, activity and death, that too by other families or antagonists!

Let us now analyse Goel's treatment of the subject page by page. On page 1 Goel writes: "The scene in the modern West, however, has undergone a great change. What we witness over there is that this 'solid historical figure' [i.e., Jesus] has evaporated into thin air as a result of painstaking Biblical and Christological research undertaken over the last more than two hundred years." This is a very shallow statement and it betrays merely Goel's *wishful thinking*. His assertion is simply not true. It is contrary to truth to claim that the people in the modern West have rejected Jesus as a non-historical figure. Some stray works questioning and even denying his real, historical existence have not achieved this goal. People in the modern West are not that foolish and uncritical to swallow any rubbish

that come in the book market. Further, there have been also sound and reasonable studies and researches that have convincingly established the historicity of Jesus. If at all there is a change in the West with regard to Christian religious life, it is not in terms of Jesus' historicity or non-historicity, but in terms of one's *commitment* to his church. The present tendency is, thus, expressed in the slogan: "Jesus, yes; Church, no," meaning that they are ready to accept and follow Jesus but not the institutional church. The theologies of liberation in all their different shades (e.g., feministic theology, black theology, theology of revolution, etc.) are stressing presently more and more the historical Jesus and his cause of liberation. To assert that the modern West has accepted Jesus' non-reality, as Goel would wish it, is sheer ignorance of facts, if not purposeful lie and distortion of truth.

On page 2 Goel states his objection to the historicity of Jesus in the following words: "Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth or at least one celebrated province of the Roman empire was involved in a preternatural darkness for three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history." Against this we may point out that Julius Africanus, who lived in the beginning of the third century, had known a reference to the preternatural darkness made by a writer named Thallus who wrote about 52 A.D. a history of the Eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War down to his own day. But Thallus had explained the darkness as an eclipse of the sun. In refutation of this Julius Africanus argues that Thallus's explanation is unacceptable, for Jesus was crucified at full noon, when no eclipse of the sun is possible (F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1974, 30).

Further, the first footnote given on page 2 mentions the book of E. Gibbon. Neither in the footnote nor in the bibliography, however, we find the *year* of its publication! This omission reflects either the disinterest in historical details or/and the poor scientific quality of the quoted or/and of the quoting author. We should also remember here that the theme of the books is precisely the refutation of the *historicity* of Jesus, and these works are supposed to be of *academic* worth! The author has also not consulted any recent scholarly works on the theme. Thus, for instance, the following works are simply ignored: Howard C. Kee, *Jesus in History. An Approach to the Study of the Gospels*, New York 1970 (2nd ed. 1977); F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and*

Christian Origins Outside the New Testament, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1974; Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1987 (2nd ed. 1993); John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew. Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol. One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, New York 1991; R. W. Funk and M. H. Smith, *The Gospel of Mark* (Red Letter Edition), California: Sonoma, 1991; Marinus de Jonge, *Jesus, the Servant-Messiah*, Yale, 1991; and J. Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, Edinburgh 1991. In this book Crossan has demonstrated that "Jesus is actually one of the best documented figures in ancient history; the challenge is the complexity of the sources." Presuming that he could not have access to very recent works, one would still expect that he consulted some of the above mentioned older works, for instance, that of H. C. Kee, *Jesus in History: An Approach to the Study of the Gospels*, 1970 and of F. F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, 1974. Intellectual honesty demands that one seriously and sincerely evaluates also other opinions and findings different from one's own.

Goel refers, of course, on pages 51-52 to a very recent book of J. D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco, 1994), and quotes from it indirectly, basing himself on the American weekly magazine *Time* of January 10, 1994. He is, however, not at all treating the issue of Jesus' historicity; he *shifts* the issue and reports what Crossan says about Jesus in terms of what he was and was not. Thus, we find Goel accepting Crossan's findings in the following words: "Jesus never cured anyone. He was a wandering teacher for whom Roman imperialism was demonic possession" (52). How could a nonexistent Jesus be at the same time a wandering teacher? Is this not itself the greatest miracle ever performed? It is none other than Goel himself who makes "the nonexistent" Jesus become a real wandering teacher! In this sense Goel can be considered a wonder worker too! But remember: the thesis of Goel's book is supposed to be the denial of any historicity to Jesus! Goel, who has set out to establish that Jesus never existed, sometimes accepts his reality, when it comes to throw mud at him or the faith of the Church. This is called opportunism and self-contradiction under the disguise of scholarship. It is not that difficult to make out a true scholar from a swindler.

In this connection it is also interesting to note that on pages 17 and 18 Goel argues that Jesus' crucifixion was only a fiction. The same J. D. Crossan, whom Goel has accepted as a scholar, however, speaks against him

in the following words: "I take it absolutely for granted that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate" (Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 1991, page 372). Already the Roman historian Tacitus (1st and 2nd Centuries) has written in his *Annals* 15, 44 that Christus had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate.

If Jesus and, consequently, his crucifixion were only an "invented history" as Goel claims, and if the four gospel writers wanted to put the blame on the Jews, they could have very well invented from the very start itself a different story in which it could have been stated that the Jews stoned him to death! Why at all the need of "inventing" the crucifixion by the Romans and then putting the blame on the Jews? Such a roundabout way of putting the blame on the Jews is not at all explainable and no special gain comes out of it for the Church.

If Jesus were an artifice for aggression, why at all should a Jesus be made to pray before his death for forgiveness for his persecutors, saying that they did not know what they were doing (Lk 23: 34)?

Also Goel's selectivity is evident in the case of his above mentioned reference to Crossan's book as found in the *Time* magazine; for he (Goel) leaves out conveniently some other valid points that came in the magazine about the books. We read there also as follows:

> Not surprisingly, the new books are controversial. Jacob Neusner, professor of religious studies at the University of South Florida, calls the Jesus Seminar "either the greatest scholarly hoax ... or the utter bankruptcy of New Testament studies – I hope the former..." Meanwhile, N. T. Wright, an Oxford University teacher ... says it is a "freshman mistake" to suppose that the Gospels do not refer to actual events simply because the writers of *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke* and *John* have clear points of view. Wright ... says the skeptical theories also fail to provide any credible explanation for how a faith founded by their pared-down Jesus could spread so rapidly after his Crucifixion. Wright's explanation: the resurrection.[1]

That Goel has simply omitted to quote these words or to refer to them, is evidence enough of his one-sidedness and selectivity.

Whereas Goel, who makes the show of an authentic Indian by denouncing foreign culture, citing an American magazine and foreign

[1] *Time*, January 10, 1994, 35.

authors, we would like to quote an Indian author writing in an Indian Newspaper *The Hindu*. Shri Prema Srinivasan writes in his article on Jerusalem under the title "Travel in an Antique Land":

> Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon is reported to have confessed that he would rather have walked in the path of Jesus than walk on the moon surface. The blasé tourist as well as the pious one feels a similar sense of wonder while during down the narrow 'via Dolorosa' – the path in which Jesus walked burdened with the cross and the crown of thorns.[2]

Prema Srinivasan is firmly convinced of Jesus' existence as also any other honest and sensible person, having no vested interest.

Selectivity is further shown in accepting certain type of arguments that do not actually conform to sound logic. For instance, Goel fully supports the conclusion of G. A. Wells that "the existence of strongly divergent Christologies in early Christian times is a strong argument against Jesus' historicity", and that "if he had really lived, early Christian literature would not 'show nearly everywhere churchly and theological conflicts and fierce quarrels between opponents' nor disagree so radically as to what kind of person he was."[3] Divergences, conflicts and quarrels about a person are for Wells and Goel valid arguments for the non-existence of that person! Nonsense at its climax! For, it means that the reality of a person is necessarily dependent on unanimity in the judgements and interpretations about that person. Not even about Mahatma Gandhiji do we have this unanimity among the Indians. Was it not a Hindu fanatic who killed him? Do we not still hear voices of protest and disappointment from the Dalits regarding Gandhiji's policies? Is it not a folly to believe that Gandhian philosophy is interpreted in the same way by all his adherents? Should not and will not human originality and creativity play any role in an interpretation? Does Gandhi cease to be a historical person just because there is divergence in the interpretations about his personality and teachings? At any rate, the proof or evidence of the reality of somebody is not unanimity of opinions about him. Unanimity can be here even suspicious, for it is actually not difficult to form an artificial consensus about an artifice, if well planned.

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[2]*The Hindu* (*Sunday Weekly Magazine*), December 10, 1995, XIII.

[3]Quoted in Goel, *Jesus Christ*, 34, footnote 63.

Moreover, even R. Bultmann whom Goel presents as "the greatest New Testament theologian of the twentieth century" (32) did not deny Jesus' historical existence or his crucifixion. It is true that he was pessimistic about the possibility of reconstructing a biography of Jesus from the gospels or to extract the exact, precise words of Jesus. This did *not* mean for him that Jesus never existed. To create the impression that even Bultmann denies historical existence to Jesus is a misrepresentation and lie. The studies undertaken afterwards have sufficiently shown that the gospel accounts are based on a historical core, although they are not chronicles or journalistic reports. No one was accompanying Jesus with a notebook to write down whatever he said and did. Yet his disciples registered many things in their hearts and minds. After some years, after his death and resurrection, these things that were orally handed over were put into writing. Naturally, therefore, there would be accidental and peripheral differences in the accounts as in any other case. We should remember that the Evangelists (the gospel writers) looked at Jesus and his deeds with different concerns and from different viewpoints. A simple test with a group of people will shed light on such phenomena. The unity in diversity among all the four gospels is an evidence for the genuineness of the experiences. Uniformity is not the sole norm of truth. If there were such uniformity in the gospels, one should rather suspect them as artificial creations. The argument of Wells and Goel does not hold water, but is based on false assumptions and presuppositions.

On page 3 the author points out that Philo who wrote a history of the Jews does not know Jesus Christ and Christians; so also Justus of Tiberias. Simply because Jesus is not mentioned by them, for whatever reasons it might be, one cannot logically conclude that he did not exist. If Goel wants to conclude so, it betrays only his lack of logic. All historical narratives need not be mentioning *everything*; the authors can very well omit certain things according to their discretion, especially if the items would have some negative bearing upon their interests. Another important and especially relevant point here is that Philo's lifetime was till 54 AD as Goel himself writes. That means his work should have been composed still a little bit earlier. The Christian movement was only under way then; it had not yet gained momentum and mass following to attract wide notice. The reason why Philo and Justus, a contemporary of Philo, did not mention Jesus Christ and Christians can be thus explained as either purposeful omission or lack of

information. To argue that non-reality of Jesus was the *only* reason for that would be bad reasoning.

On the same page 3 it is mentioned that the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (who lived in the first century) "completed two monumental works – *The Jewish War* in 77 AD and the *Antiquities of the Jews* fifteen years later." Then we have the following assertion:

> These histories mention no Jesus Christ. His first work relates to AD 66-74... The work has not a word about Jesus or his followers. Christian apologists point to two passages, one long and the other very short, which mention Jesus as a wise man and also as Christ. But scholars have proved quite convincingly that both of them are either clumsy Christian interpolations or have been tempered [*sic*] with by Christian scribes. It has to be remembered that none of the manuscripts of Josephus' *Antiquities* is older than the eleventh century, so that Christian scribes have had ample opportunities for tempering with the text.[4]

Let us now closely observe the above passage. The statement that there is no mention about Jesus Christ in the first work is true, but this does not mean anything at all regarding the historicity of Jesus, as we have pointed out above regarding Goel's argument based on a mere *non*-mentioning by Philo and Justus. Another thing to be noted here is the lack of clarity in the passage itself. Immediately after stating that the first work [i.e., *The Jewish War*] has not a word about Jesus or his followers, Goel continues: "Christian apologists point to two passages, one long and the other very short, which mention Jesus as a wise man and also as Christ" (3-4). The impression created in the readers is that these passages are from the just mentioned first work *The Jewish War*. But, in fact, the "two passages" are from the second work *Antiquities of the Jews*. Another confusion is regarding the expression "Jesus as a wise man and also as Christ" (4). Goel does not distinguish between the two expressions found in the said two quotes. Whereas the longer quote does speak of Jesus as "a wise man" and "the Christ," the shorter quote says about him as one "who was called the Christ." This will be clearer when we shall see the two quotes below. There is actually a big difference between "Jesus as the Christ" and "Jesus who was *called* Christ." The former reflects faith in Jesus as the Christ, whereas the latter, agnosticism or non-commitment. Goel's statement is, thus, misleading,

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[4]Goel, *Jesus Christ*, 3-4.

when he presents the two quotes as of the same level. He does neither quote the two passages nor speak about them with precision, but makes a sweeping assertion. What value should one give to such assertions in his book, which claims to be scientific and open to facts? Let us remember once more, a thing is better understood in its causes. The hasty and false assertions and *conclusions* of the book tell us again and again that it is born out of animosity and hatred against Christianity or/and Christian missionary work. Intellectual honesty and academic openness to truth are hardly to be expected and found here.

Again, the statement that "scholars have proved quite convincingly that both of them are either clumsy Christian interpolations or have been tempered with by Christian scribes," is *itself* wrong! There are three important facts to be noted here. 1) The said interpolations are found *only* in the long quote, but *not* in the shorter one. 2) The interpolations are made with regard to the *interpretation* about Jesus, and *not* about his *historical* existence itself. 3) The shorter quote is beyond doubt without any such interpolation. Let us now scrutinize both the quotes in question.

First we shall see the shorter quote. Describing the trial of James, who was executed in the year 62, during the interregnum between the prefects Festus and Albinus, Flavius Josephus writes as follows: "And so he [Ananus, the high priest] convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others."[5] In order to identify James the author mentions his relation to Jesus. This implies that Jesus was well known and his existence taken for granted. The text also indicates that it is devoid of any Christian interpolation. This is poignantly shown by the phrase "who was called the Christ." Since Flavius Josephus did not believe in Jesus as the Christ, he refers to him here not as the Christ but as the one "who was *called* the Christ," whereas in the longer quote given below it would read: "He was the Messiah."

The second quote, the longer one, is as follows:

> About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When

[5]Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 200, cited in J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 373.

> Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.[6]

The Church historian Eusebius, who was bishop of Caesarea in the beginning of the 4th century, cites the above text of Flavius Josephus in his works *Ecclesiastical History* (*Hist. Eccl.*, i. II. 7 f.), written about 325 AD and in his *Demonstration of the Gospel* (*Demonstratio evangelica*, iii. 5. 105). Origen who had known a century before Eusebius the works and mentality of Flavius, however, asserts that Flavius did not believe in Jesus as the Christ (*Contra Celsum*, i. 47). That means, the passage in the long quote that speaks of Jesus as the Christ could not have been from Flavius. So, too, the other details that see him in the light of Christian faith could not stem from him. This can be due either to some *interpretations* made by a Christian scribe in the manuscript in the time between Origen and Eusebius, or to the simple fact of Flavius as a historian merely *reporting* or mentioning the beliefs of the time. Thus, the clauses "if indeed one ought to call him a man," "He was the Messiah," "On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, ... other marvellous things about him" can be the result of either of them. They are, however, not his own beliefs, for at the most he could have only said about Jesus as the one *called* the Messiah, as we noted above in the shorter quote.

On page 5 Goel writes: "the word 'Christian' does not appear in the Christian literature itself before 140 AD." What ignorance! This is one of the examples of the wrong and unstudied assertions of Goel in his book. The New Testament book *The Acts of the Apostles* which was composed between 70 and 90 AD – and at any rate before 100 AD – mentions the term "Christians" in 11:26 as follows: "... and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians." Here we have another example of Goel's way of simply daring to assert things as he likes.

On page 8 Goel argues that the story of Jesus' birth does not make sense because "neither Nazareth nor Bethlehem were (*sic*) under Roman

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[6]Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 63; As cited by J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 373.

jurisdiction in 1 AD." But who told Goel that Jesus was born in 1 AD? We hold that, remaining within the framework of the present way of the calendar, Jesus was born in 4 or 6/7 BC. This is because the one who made this calculation (the monk Exiguus) miscalculated the year of Jesus' birth by a few years.

On page 10 Goel, again, asserts simply: "Mary did not remain a virgin after the birth of Jesus." As argument for this ill-based conclusion he writes on page 11 that the evangelist "Matthew ... himself mentions Mary as having conjugal relations with Joseph." This is another piece of deliberate distortion of truth, for nowhere does Matthew say so. He only says that Joseph did not know Mary "until she had borne a son" (Mt 1:25). The word "until" does not necessarily mean that he had known her after the birth of the son. There is a parallel case in the Old Testament book 2 Sam 6:23; there we read that Michael had no child to the day of her death. This does not mean that she had borne children *after* her death. Goel's reasoning betrays poor logic. If someone says about somebody that he remained a patriot until his death, does it mean that after his death he was not a patriot? On the same page Goel makes, again, a false assertion that "Elsewhere in the gospels we find Mary being mentioned as the mother of several children besides Jesus." Goel, however, does not say where this is mentioned. By simply saying "elsewhere" Goel creates the impression that it is really mentioned somewhere. If Goel sincerely considers the alleged accounts in the gospels mentioning Mary as the mother of several children besides Jesus as really historical, how can he then deny the historicity of Jesus consistently? The mention of the brothers and sisters of Jesus is to be understood against the Oriental practice of calling one's cousins so. If she had several children, Jesus could have entrusted her to one of them, instead of entrusting his mother to his beloved disciple (see Jn 19:27).

Another nonsense on the same page is a betrayal and manipulation of Christian theological and dogmatic assertions. He writes:" "The Catholic Church, however, has extended the dogma of Mary's virginity to her and her female ancestors' immaculate conception *ad infinitum*." Goel simply exhibits his sheer ignorance of the dogma of Immaculate Conception. It has actually *nothing at all* to do with virginity!

On page 12 he finds an explanation for "floating the myth of virgin birth," namely, to overcome the acute embarrassment caused by Mary's sexual immorality. Here arises the question, why at all should the disciples

have first created an embarrassment and caused an unnecessary burden to overcome it later, if Jesus did not really exist? If it were simply a legend, they could have very well presented Jesus in ordinary terms without causing any such embarrassment! Goel's point would make sense only if Jesus really lived, and if he were the son of an immoral woman. In that case Goel contradicts his basic thesis of the non-existence of Jesus. If Goel accepts that there was a problem of embarrassment, he should also accept that Jesus was historically *real*.

Further, if Jesus were not a historical figure why at all does Goel refer to and accept the Jewish tradition, that too a "long-standing tradition," that he was "the fruit of an adulterous union between Mary and a Roman soldier named Panthera"? (12). One thing to be noted here is that Goel who has set out to disprove Jesus' historicity is actually attacking the morality of his mother Mary, thereby indirectly affirming his real existence!

On the same page 12 Goel continues with his argument of the "unfortunate circumstance of Jesus' birth" and puts it as a possible explanation of Jesus' "hostility to his mother and lack of enthusiasm for his brothers." To substantiate this Goel refers to the following Gospel passages: John 2:3-4; Luke 8:19-21, 11:27-28; Mathew 12:46-50 and Mark 3:31-35. There are two points to be made here. First, if Goel accepts the texts as showing Jesus' hostility to Mary, he is also at the same time accepting the reality of Jesus, which he actually wants to deny. At this stage of Goel's discussion, one may wonder what really the theme of his book is: the reality of Jesus or the morality of his mother. Second, the texts in question do not at all express or imply Jesus' hostility to his mother or lack of enthusiasm for his brothers. In John 2 the whole episode of the wedding feast at Cana proves just the opposite. Even though his time (of glorification) was not yet come, Jesus performs a miracle precisely because of Mary's request and, thus, honours her! A person's action is the best clue to interpret his words and attitudes. That Mary is addressed as "woman" has to be assessed against the background of the Aramaic language where the term does not in itself express disrespect, rather respect. It has also a deep biblical meaning against the Old Testament background of the first woman Eve. Mary is the new or second Eve who cooperates with Jesus, the second Adam. This is very well reflected in the context of the death of Jesus when he calls her again "Woman" (Jn 19:26). The context in Luke 8:19-21 is Jesus' love for those who hear the word of God and do it. They are so dear to him that he considers them as his mother and brethren. This does not mean that he was

hostile to his mother and brethren. The same is the message in the other two parallel texts of Mark and Matthew and also in Luke 11:27-28. Goel's way of using biblical texts betrays only his lack of proper knowledge and his unwillingness to know the true sense of the texts. Distorting the meaning of texts and reading *into* them one's own pre-conceived interpretations in order to serve one's vested interests is unscholarly.

On page 16 Goel writes that "all through nearly two thousand years of Christian history, Jews have been accused of deicide and subjected ... to cruel pogroms which culminated in the Nazi Holocaust." Does Goel sincerely and seriously think that Adolf Hitler was an ardent Christian believer who loved Jesus so much that he retaliated the Jewish conspiracy against Jesus? No serious and open-minded student of history can think so.

Contradictions are different from *self*-contradictions. An event experienced by different persons can be differently narrated. The murder of the American President John F. Kennedy is a historical fact; still there are divergent versions about it. No sensible person would argue that because there is divergence, the murder did not take place. Objectivity is not necessarily dependent on absolute harmony of witnesses. An artificially fabricated story has all the more chances of such congruence, precisely because it is well planned and thought out. If the early church wanted to propagate a fabricated legend about Jesus, it would not have produced more than one gospel. Nor would have the later church approved more than one gospel as official and orthodox.

An example of self-contradiction is Sita Ram Goel's book itself! The book argues for the non-historicity of Jesus, on the one hand, and affirms Jesus to be born of Mary illegitimately, on the other hand. How can a person who is born, although illegitimately, be at the same time nonexistent and non-historical? But this is what Goel says. According to him, Jesus is an illegitimate child of Mary and at the same time a nonexistent person, a mere artifice! That too, an artifice for aggression! The teaching of Jesus as is summarized in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5 and 6) is a glaring contradiction to this allegation of Jesus being an artifice for aggression. His advice is not at all the same as the instruction to kill others in the pursuit of performing one's *karma* as *nishkamakarma*, but rather to give one's own life for others. Jesus' advice to love the enemies, not to resist evil with evil, and his example of washing the feet of the disciples, rebuking Peter for cutting the ear of a servant who came to catch him and healing the ear, praying for

forgiveness for his executioners, do not at all give us a picture of an aggressive man, nor do they promote aggression in any way. If Christians wanted aggression as their motto, they should have either destroyed the New Testament or created a different Jesus. With the Jesus of the New Testament, however, there is no support to any kind of aggression. It makes no sense at all to allege that the Christians have fabricated a non-violent and humble Jesus as artifice for *aggression*! It would have some sense if the allegation were that the Christians made the Jesus of the New Testament into a warrior figure for the sake of aggression. To invent a meek Jesus who instructs the disciples not to resist one who is evil, but to love the enemies (Mt 5:39-44) would never suit the purpose of aggression.

Goel should have also known that there were Christians in India even before the arrival of the western missionaries in the 16th century. These Christians known as the Thomas Christians had no policy of aggression; rather they lived in peace and harmony with the Hindus and Moslems of the locality. The Hindu rulers even gave many privileges to the Christians and considered them equal to the respected groups of the Nairs. Jesus of the Christian faith was the same then as he is today. To think that Christianity is an import from the West is due to lack of historical knowledge. It is true that some of the western missionaries who had worked in India to spread the Christian faith, unfortunately launched into a polemic against Hinduism.

Besides the living Christian tradition, we have Jewish as well as Islamic traditions accepting the reality of Jesus of Nazareth. The mainstream of the Jews only disagreed with the Christians in the interpretation of Jesus as the Christ or Messiah. Among the contemporary Jewish scholars we have many renowned thinkers and authors of international reputation who have accepted Jesus as a historical personality and written about him. Some of them are the following (the titles of their English books are given within brackets): Schalom Ben-Chorin, Martin Buber, Pinchas E. Lapide (*Jesus in Israel*, Gladbeck 1970), J. Salvador, Samuel Krauss, Max Brod, Franz Werfel, Robert Eisler, Joachim Schoeps, Morris Goldstein (*Jesus in the Jewish Tradition*, New York 1950), Joseph Klausner, (*Jesus of Nazareth*, trans. Herbert Danby, New York 1926), Jacob Neusner (*From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*, Prentice-Hall 1973), Ascher Finkel (*The Teacher of Nazareth*, Leiden 1964), David Flusser, Frank Andermann, Haim Cohen (*Trial and Death of Jesus*, Tel Aviv 1968), Aharon Kabak (*The Narrow Path*, Jerusalem 1968). Martin Büber and

Schalom Ben-Chorin respect Jesus as their Jewish brother. S. Ben-Chorin has written a book in German with the title *Bruder Jesus*, Munich 1967.

According to Islamic teachings, Jesus is one of the five great prophets. The *Quran (Koran)* refers to Jesus in many *suras*, say, in more than 25 passages.

Even contemporary atheistic and Marxist philosophers like Kolakowski, Gardavsky, Machovec, Roger Garaudy, and Ernst Bloch have accepted Jesus and the values for which he lived and had to die (see especially E. Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* [The Principle Hope], Frankfurt 1973, pages 1489f., and 1494f.).

In addition to all this there are several serious studies on the historicity of Jesus which have conclusively demonstrated his real existence. It is worthwhile to compare the real scholarly quality of such works with the shallow arguments and emotive conclusions of the books that have been written to deny his historicity. Sita Ram Goel has selected some of them in order to serve his purposes and to arrive at his pre-conceived conclusions!

Jesus Christ does not need a birth certificate from Goel. The violent opposition to him in manifold forms is itself a powerful testimony *for* the continued presence and influence of Jesus in the world. His opponents managed to get him crucified. His glorious resurrection, however, proved to be a fatal blow to their plans and hopes. This happens again and again. The one who was once killed cannot be any more killed by the arrows of words. The more you attempt to eliminate him, the more powerful he will resurge, and it will only hurt anyone to kick against the goads (Acts 26:14).

Maybe Sita Ram Goel was not aware of his passion that blinded his vision. Hatred can make people blind and lead them to rash judgements. As has been pointed out at the outset, a thing is better understood in its causes. The causes of Goel's book are too evident to be overlooked: animosity against Christianity motivated by the manipulative designs of Hindutva *vadis*, disapproval of the Hindus' love for Jesus, and misplaced feelings of insecurity. No wonder that the book is highly selective, and that it abounds in self-contradictions, half truths, suppressed truths and distortions.

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Literature Survey: 2

RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES AND THE CONTESTING CIVILIZATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA

Douglas L. Berger & Irfan A. Omar*

The following is a review essay on Gerald James Larson's book *India's Agony over Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995, pages xiv + 393).

1. The Nature of the Agony

Independent India, after throwing off the yoke of almost a century of British colonial rule, was faced with the dilemma of determining what direction the country would take; what kinds of sacrifices would be required from its citizens; and what sort of political, social and economic transformations would allow this ancient civilization to take its due place among the respectable nation-states of the world. While at least four thousand years of civilizational history were there to draw upon, the sediments of the Indian traditions were both deeply rich and deeply diverse. The challenges of keeping the religious, ethnic, regional, linguistic and social plurality of the Indian heritage alive and vibrant within the new political and geopolitical framework of nationalization and globalisation proved to be fraught with challenges, complexities and conflict. G. J. Larson's recent work *India's Agony over Religion* undertakes a thorough and informed examination of how the pluralism of India's heritage has affected its varying national identities and contemporary social and political struggles. As the title suggests, this work deals with the religious crisis (or crises) in contemporary India. It seeks to identify a deep connection between modern and ancient strands of

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thought and culture by way of seeing through the complexity of India's cultural heritage, the sources of which are as multiple as they are varied. Larson's argument is that a sustained study of these historical heritages is necessary to see the current crises in a fresh light (x). He contends that not only are there multiple sources and layers of India's cultural and intellectual heritage, but that most of these "layers of culture and history are operating in contemporary India ... as present-day living traditions demanding to be heard in the current struggles to shape India's future" (x).

In essence, the opening chapters (2 and 3) provide a "historical overview," an accurate but decidedly cursory one, of India's rich cultural and historical past. Larson's aim is to bring out the "broader dimensions" of India's history by locating what he calls the "Old" and "New" Indic formations. These classifications draw out the prescient differences while highlighting a continuity of a sort in the historical progression of what India has been. These are the aforementioned "layers" of the South Asian civilization and cultural traditions. They include "Old Indic Formations" such as the Indus Valley Civilization, the Indo-Brahmanical, the Indo-Sramanical and the Indic (Hindu-Buddhist-Jain) as well as the "New Indic Formations" which include the Indo-Islamic and the Indo-Anglian dimensions.

Chapter 4 deals with the heart of the matter, namely an attempt to locate the "essence" of Indian civilization with respect of the "discontinuities" explained in previous chapters. Chapter 5, the longest of all, addresses among other things, "India's hybrid discourse of modernity." It highlights eccentricities of the notions "religious," "secular," and "citizen" in Indian usage. It ends with a discussion of five major religious crises facing India today, applying the foregoing analysis to explicate the contemporary issues. The conclusion suggests recommendations for a possible solution to these crises.

The work is crafted to be useful for non-specialists, especially with its lengthy explorations into "the depth of India's religious crisis and its historical antecedents" (xi). However, the technical discussions and jargons concerning Indian philosophy and religions may not do much to keep the attention of a non-specialist intact, and Larson himself admits that the technical philosophical analysis he invokes is at times "rather dense and difficult." Despite his best intentions to lay out Indian philosophy in

precise, simpler terms, Larson assumes some knowledge on the part of the reader as well.

2. The Agony of Being Incoherent

Before we proceed to discuss the heart of *India's Agony*, it must be said that Larson has taken a bold step in trying to contextualise the problem in such a wider historical sphere. In identifying the "problem," to use a simple word, Larson unmasks deep-seated "contradictions" inherent in the composition of the thick-layered cultural traditions of contemporary India. Among the most striking and notable of these is the notion of hybridity. Although no one should be surprised to see multiple strands of culture at work in Indian history, the way they are linked to India's deep past, on the one hand, and are shown to be operating in contemporary movements and in the contestation of religious identities, on the other, is refreshingly challenging. It is in this aspect that Larson's main contribution may be located. These hybrid identities turn out to be conscious and deliberate as a living proof of India's resilience in the face of multiple influences. Perhaps, it is the immense capacity of the mantle of Indian civilization to absorb in its thickness and "permanences" all that is different, which allows the hybrid to appear as indigenous over time.

Thus, as Larson reiterates, there is no essence of Indian civilization, but rather, emerging out of the five historical periods enumerated above, there is a "certain distinctive kind of ongoing conversation or cluster of conversations about the salience of certain diverse, even contradictory cultural values" (143). He goes on to ask a question that thematises the problematic: "How is it possible to maintain a reasonably stable community over time in a context of mutually contested values" (143). The premise that a stable civilization cannot be sustained without some sort of axiological continuity leads Larson to conclude that "the deep and substantive coherence in Indian history and civilization is in the ongoing conversation itself that cuts across or spills over the boundaries of periods and groups and provides, finally, an all-India dialogue" (143).

A proposed "sketch" of India's ongoing conversation is offered based on selected "frameworks of meaning" or "semantic fields" within and between which religious and philosophical issues were enjoined by various contesting parties in each historical period. This is done with the qualification that India's systems of thought taken together do not present

us with an essence of values, but rather with Wittgensteinian "family resemblances" (145). The dialogue and confrontation that emerge from Indian history do not present the same themes over and over again varying only in manners of expression, but "overlapping themes" that allow us to cogently compare, contrast and classify them (145).

Larson proposes an innovative way to carry out the classification of the different periods of thought and religions in Indian history. He makes reference to the notion of *abh va* or "absence" that was employed by the classical Naiyayikas, and Navya-Ny ya since Va aspatimisra to explain relations between certain phenomena. There are in this scheme four kinds of absence. The first is called *pr g-abh va*, or "prior absence," which one can say of particular phenomena before their material creation. The next is called *atyanta-abh va*, or "absolute absence," which characterizes putative phenomena that in material or logical reality cannot possibly exist, such as a "round square" or "the son of a barren woman." There is also *any nya-abh va* or "mutual absence," which is a relation between distinct phenomena, such as between a jar and a tree; the locus of a tree having the absence of a jar, for example. Finally, we have *pradhv msa-abh va*, or "consequent absence," which is said to be the mode of a material phenomenon after its destruction. Larson notes further that these four kinds of absence are sometimes reduced to two kinds, namely, *samsarga-abh va*, "absence of relation," which includes the strictly material prior, absolute and consequent absences, and *any nya-abh va*, which is a logical mode of absence. This methodological approach provides us with a new analytic tool for identifying and classifying things, as it "enables one to speak about an object, or tease out what an object is, in terms of what it is not" (147). Larson commits himself to making special use of the notion of mutual absences in classifying the "family resemblances" that can be found to exist in the periods of Indian intellectual and spiritual history (148).

For purposes of brevity, we shall simply reproduce the chart Larson constructs contrasting the different characteristics of the major periods of Indian philosophical and religious history, and then clarify what these contrasts entail. The chart assumes that under the "Old Indic" forms of thought are included the historical periods identified earlier as the Indus Valley, the Indo-Brahminical, Indo-Sraminical, and Indic, while under

"New Indic" forms we should include the Indo-Islamic and Indo-Anglian periods. The chart contrasts these periods according to their ontologies, epistemologies, psychologies, social anthropologies and theologies.

Indian Frameworks of Meaning
(Larson, Table 4.1, page 161)

Old Indic	*New Indic*
1. Ontology	
- no separation of mind-body, thought-extension	- separation of mind-body, thought-extension
- indeterminate ultimacy (*nirgu a*)	- determinate ultimacy (*sagu a*)
2. Epistemology	
- no separation of reason experience	- separation of reason and experience
- cognitive frustration	- cognitive certainty
3. Psychology	
- no separation of birth and rebirth	- separation of birth and death
- intra-personal plurality	- individual person or believer
- diachronic ontogeny of more than one life	- single life experience
4. Social Anthropology	
- no separation of person and person	- separation of person from person
- interpersonal plasticity	- individual person in community
- synchronic phylogeny of hierarchical ranking	- historical existence

5. Theology

- no separation of divine and human	- separation of divine and human
- cosmo-theology of polymorphic unity	- theology of monomorphic multiplicity and certainty

Larson repeats in several places the caution that what he is offering in this work is only a "preliminary sketch" of the contrasts that these different periods, the "Old India" and the "New Indic," exhibit, since there are many qualifications and nuances to be taken into consideration with regard to each of the characterizations of thought systems falling within each particular period listed in the chart, as well as blurry boundaries between the Old and New Indic which have seen a great number of "overlapping" themes (160). With this qualification in mind, we can briefly explain the contrasts between the Old and New Indic under each of the categories in the following ways.

The Old Indic schools of Ny ya, S khya, Yoga and Ved nta held the mind to be more or less physical, leaving no distinction between mind and matter, while at the same time, in S khya, Yoga and Ved nta, as well as Buddhism and Jainism, there is a sharp distinction between the concrete world of determinate phenomena and an indeterminate principle (*puru a*, *Brahman*, *kevala*, *nirv a*) which is seen in various ways as the goal of the religious life (149-150). The New Indic ontologies, in contrast, separate pure Platonic ideas or the abstracted *cogito* from the phenomenal world, and their respective theologies tend to separate a determinate form or realm of pure, eternal existence (God, heaven, abstract rationality, etc.). Epistemologically, the Old Indic traditions made no room for a separation between reason and experience, as evidenced in Ny ya's logical use of "empirical examples" (*d nta*), the doctrine of all the schools of event-centred cognitions, although they do generally agree, as in S khya and Ved nta notions of ignorance, that empirical experience properly analysed turns out to be fundamentally uncertain (151-52). The New Indic epistemologies, on the other hand, put great amounts of faith in pure reason, *a priori* knowledge, scientific realism, or the determinate revelation of God in the Torah, the Qur'an or the Bible. In the realm of

psychology, the Old Indic strands of thought viewed the individual as born with certain dispositional tendencies or "traces" (*sa sk ra, v sana*) inherited from the karmic effects of previous lives, and, thus, individual identity was the result of a process that transcends the present life (*sa s ra*) (153). The New Indic period sees life, on the other hand, as limited to the present individual existence, and so only its free choices and self-determinations have moral consequences for society and the individual's religious fate. In the Old Indic period, social life is ordered according to caste distinctions (as in the case of Indo-Brahminical and Indic categories) and monastic distinctions (as in Indo-Sraminical groups such as the Buddhists and Jains). In both, however, the individual is only a part of a more largely integrated social whole, and, thus, there is no clear-cut distinction between persons as such (154-55). In the New Indic period, however, we have the equality of all believers in the *dar al-islam* and an overriding focus on individualism, personal rights and citizenship in the Indo-Anglian state, both of which idealize the integrity of individuality (154-55).

Finally, in the Old Indic schools, whether they were the believing Vedic Brahmins or the Indic Devotionalists or the atheistic Sraminical Jains or Buddhists or the S khya and M m sa Indic philosophers, gods could always intervene in human affairs, become incarnate, or evolve into the natural world as a whole, or alternatively, *aj va* matter was filled with *j va* souls, or *sa s ra* and *nirv a* were the same (158-159). In any event, there was, for them, no absolute separation between the human world and the divine. The New Indic period, on the other hand, insisted on the clear-cut separation between God and the world in the religions of Islam and post-Reformation missionary Christianity (158, 160). Taken together in the qualified and general sense in which Larson has presented these contrasts, the differences between the "conversational themes" in the Old and New Indic periods are "dramatic and fundamental" (160).

Understanding the fundamental contrasts in thought and themes between the Old and New Indic periods offers boons to both the scholarly investigation of Indian thought in the West, as well as to a more general, deeper understanding of the ongoing conversation and conflicts of Indian civilization. Larson cites the "endless articles and books on 'Sa kara and Bradley' or 'Sa kara and Hegel'," and dismisses any equations that might

be made between Indic philosophical views such as those of Ved nta and Yog c ra and German Idealistic systems (162). After all, distinctions that hold for New Indic philosophical appropriations such as Idealism are "simply absent" from Old Indic philosophical themes, and this makes it fundamentally and methodologically illegitimate to analyse and explicate the latter in terms of the former. More importantly, however, is the lesson that neither the Old nor the New Indic strands of thought (or spirituality) constitute "essences." They are, each in their turn, rather contributors, bearing certain "family resemblances," in "the ongoing conversation regarding the nature and future of India as a civilization-state" (162). The Old Indic traditions, merely because they are more ancient and putatively more native – though they are still present in the Indian life and need to take their full place in this "ongoing conversation" – cannot by any means be construed as the "foundation" or "essence" of India to satisfy some conservative representations of national identity. Similarly, even though the "New Indic" traditions are latecomers, and "aggressive and strident" latecomers to the subcontinent at that, they can neither be rejected as irrelevant intruders to Indian civilization nor idealized as the modern, progressive future of the country, rendering its more traditional forms of culture obsolete. The New Indic patterns of thought and faith have after all been part of India's life for centuries now, so rather than privileging or rejecting them they should be full partners in the living multi-logue of the culture (163).

Larson's conclusions about the partnership of the Old and New Indic forms of Indian culture in the "ongoing conversation" of the civilization are certainly welcome. This metaphor of "conversation" is made all the more satisfactory when one considers that, during the Indic period, the favoured form of religious and philosophical dissent was the debate. Entire handbooks on the rules, etiquette, conditions of victory and defeat, and kinds of debate were found on all three of the religious traditions of the Indic period, and the various schools of Hindu, Buddhist and Jain philosophies continually refined this art through confrontation with one another and in conformity with the continued innovations in logic that all the schools were putting forward. This most remarkably civil form of religious and philosophical disagreement of the Indic period could serve as a fruitful and more peaceful model for the future of this "ongoing conversation" of Indian civilization.

There seems no reason to overly quibble with the contrasting distinctions Larson posits between Old and New Indic worldviews and values, given the insight and care he has invested into justifying and qualifying the classifications he suggests. There is something odd, nonetheless, about Larson's introduction of *abh va*s or "absences" as a methodological tool to contrast Old and New Indic forms. There may be something attractive about using an Indian philosophical tool for characterizing relations in the analysis of Indian history, but in this case, it seems the attractiveness of this attempt is much greater than the validity in applying it. Larson claims that the similarities between schools of thought and religion within the Old and New Indic periods do not constitute "essences," but rather are "family resemblances" in the Wittgensteinian sense. He goes on, after presenting his chart of contrasts between the Old and New Indic, reproduced above, to assert that the "absences of separation" between reason and experience, person and person, the divine and the world, and so forth, are the "counterpositives" (*pratiyogin*) of the doctrinal features of the New Indic period (160). In the Navya-Ny ya, however, mutual absence (*anyonya-abh va*) is determined by the identity (*t d tmya*) of the substances involved in the given relation. That is to say, the identity (*t d tmya*) of an object is defined as the mutual absence of its counterpositive (*t d tmyasa ba dha-vacchinnapratiyogutako 'bhavo nyonyabh vah*). Put simply, the relation of "mutual absence" that Larson wishes to use to compare historical doctrines was actually used within the Ny ya logic to compare concrete particulars. Furthermore, these particulars were thought to have their own "essences" (*t d tmya* = "that itself") partly by virtue of the fact that they were not the *loci* of whatever other substances that were not identical with them. Absences traditionally conceived could not compare mere family resemblances, much less doctrines of historical religions or philosophies, which are not thought by Larson to be homogeneous essences, but rather pluralistic agglomerations. So the attempt to use absences as they were formulated and employed by Navya-Ny ya in an analysis of Larson's kind is simply not methodologically appropriate, at least not without a complete reformulation of the idea of "mutual absence," a reformulation Larson does not offer. Even were this not a problem, it could still be asked: what sort of sense can we make of the claim that what gives New Indic forms of thought and religion their identity, or what confers "family resemblances"

on them, is the absence of corresponding Old Indic ideas from them? The identity of historical forms of thought cannot merely be conceived as the absence of other forms of thought from them. Larson's attempt to locate a quasi-logical "coherence" to India's "conversations" of Old Indic and New Indic periods in this way smacks more of a project with Hegelian, rather than Indian, assumptions. In our view, Larson needs to seek out more cogent methodological foundations for his picture of the history of Indian thought.

3. The Dialectic of the Current Crises

Finally, the analysis of the five religious crises "currently unfolding" in India (226; note that the work under review was published in 1995) is made possible by way of Larson's deeper discussions of Old and New Indic formations. These crises include the conflict arising out of the Sikh demands for Khalistan; Kashmiri Muslims' struggles with respect to issues of autonomy and separation from India; the Shah Bano case and the Muslim Women's Bill of 1986; the controversy surrounding the treatment of OBC's (Other Backward Classes) and the Mandal Report; and, finally, the most important of all, the Ayodhya crisis and the destruction of the 16th century mosque by Hindu nationalists. Larson gives excellent historical, political and ideological background and recounting of each of these major events, and explains each in terms of the Old Indic/New Indic paradigm which the earlier chapters have elucidated. The Sikh demands for Khalistan, for instance, are illustrated as an uneasy dynamic of the search for synthetic religious harmony at the foundations of Sikh faith with the pressures of progressive stages of New Indic nationalisms under the Mughals, the British Empire and the Independent India. The current economic and political difficulties with OBC's are also manifested as a dialectic of the ancient, paternalistic inclusivism of Old Indic Brahminical culture with the New Indic recognition of individual rights within the modern state. The Ayodhya crisis, in turn, is also a struggle of identities between the Old Indic in both its Brahminical and Devotional strands, which insists on the equivalence of modern Indian national identity with traditional "Hindu" values and the New Indic religious, axiological and political claims of the Islamic civilization. These modern crises, it is Larson's contention, simply cannot be understood without recourse to a comprehension of how the Old and New Indic "conversation" which

constitutes contemporary Indian civilizational heritage, and informs modern issues such as "secularism," "communalism" and India's unique self-understanding of its "nationhood."

In this contention, we believe Larson is certainly right. A great deal of abundantly helpful light can be shed upon the contemporary problems and religio-political and social conundrums of India. However, we wonder whether Larson's reflective approach, thematised in this historical/analytic fashion, for all its manifest merit, can lead by itself to productive solutions. Larson claims that the Nehruvian vision of a secular India has basically failed, as its only two responses to the demands for respect from various Indian religious communities have been either complete cave-in or militaristic suppression (291). Larson adduces that, with the proper historical conceptualisation of how India's ongoing cultural conversation has resulted in the "hybridisation" of modern discourse he has offered, it needs to be accepted that religiosity in India has to serve as the basis for a revisioning of South Asian society as a "confederacy" of faiths, and so be conceived as the foundation for community rights, universal justice and a multi-religious state (292-300). Larson is careful to point out that the future of India is for the country's people to decide, and that what he offers here are nothing but tentative insights into "new beginnings" (292). It is doubtful, however, whether Brahmins in the "Hindi heartlands" are likely to see themselves anytime soon as embodying an "Old Indic" order, that India's one hundred twenty million Muslims understand their identity as more closely historically connected with the modern Indo-Anglian period, that even the state envisions itself, after the BJP takeover in the mid '90's and the recent Congress victory in the spectacular 2004 elections, as the secular tamer of the religious masses. While there may indeed be substantive validity to the perspective that India's religious communities have historically complicated sedimented identities, it is their self-understanding, and not rarefied academic schematisations of those identities, that have directed the mass social movements of the nation in the last hundred years and continue to do so, as the recent ransacking of the Bandarkar Institute in Pune amply demonstrates. We are left with the question of whose understanding of India's identity will help whom to accomplish what with India's future?

Despite these reservations, it is undeniable that Larson's *India's Agony over Religion* is indeed an erudite, complex, and robust inquiry, which confronts a series of challenging issues facing India today. Overall, it is provocative, thoughtful and deserves praise for taking up the mighty task of understanding "hybrid" discourses of modernity. In closing, it is hoped that the conversation Larson has initiated continues at various levels, as the future of India heavily depends on the "on-going debate not unlike the one that has always been unfolding through the centuries" (292).

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BOOK REVIEWS

Alston, W. M. Jr. and M. Welker, ed., *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003, pages xiv + 449, ISBN: 0-8028-4776-5.

This book is a collection of the papers of systematic theologians of the Reformed Tradition who took part in the international consultation convened by the Centre of Theological Inquiry at the *Internationales Wissenschaftsforum* in Heidelberg, Germany, during March 18-22, 1999. It consists of five parts as follows: "Reformed Identity in Historical Continuity and Contextual Awareness" (Part I), "How to Shape Reformed Ecclesiology" (Part II), "Spirit and Covenant: Reformed Pneumatology in Very Different Contexts" (Part III), "Affirming and Questioning Reformed Doctrines in Ecumenical Conversation" (Part IV), and "Ecumenicity and Ethical Profiles of Reformed Theology: Catholicity and Practical Contextuality" (Part V). In addition to the introduction by the two editors, there are 28 articles/papers, each by a different author dealing with the many relevant themes and challenges for Christian theology from the perspective of Reformed Theology. Thus, the book is the combined effort of 30 scholars.

In the first article, Y. H. Kim discusses the different spiritual challenges of the present millennium and tries to give theological responses to them. He focuses on the following five challenges posed by Postmodernism (with its tendency to relativize and dissolve truth and values), Religious Pluralism, New Age Movement (with its neopaganism, astrology, and reincarnation), High Technological Secularism, and Cyber-culture. It is to be appreciated that the author boldly and unambiguously makes it clear what the Reformed Theology professes and what it cannot accept. Thus, he defends the Reformed Tradition of "the Scripture alone" (*sola scriptura)* (8-9) and "Christ alone" (*solus Christus*) where the uniqueness of Christ is emphatically affirmed in terms of the unique incarnation and the ultimate salvific revelation of God (10-11) in view of the challenges posed by Hinduism and Islam. Here we find a close

resemblance between his position and the official Catholic teaching on the matter. He further speaks of a Reformed "post-modern" theology in terms of a claim of universal truth (14-15) as well as a creation theology and Reformed Eco- and Bio- ethics (17-18). Another interesting article from the point of view of ecumenism is Chapter 5 by W. S. Johnson on "Theology and the Church's Mission: Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Reformed" (65-81). In this article we find some interesting re-interpretations of the traditional principles of Reformation theology. Thus, "Grace alone" is explained as the ground of Catholicity (67-71), "Christ alone" as the measure of Orthodoxy (71-76), "Faith alone" as trusting the Gospel and being the Church (76-79), and "Scripture alone" as the fountainhead of ongoing reform (79-81). The conclusion on page 81 summarily appeals to us how theology can be simultaneously Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Reformed in the light of the above four principles.

Chapter 10 on "The Communion of the Triune God: Towards a Trinitarian Ecclesiology in Reformed Perspective" reiterates a basic Christian insight that Trinitarian doctrine provides the key to a proper theology of community. The author rightly shows that "Genuine human community has its ultimate basis in the communion of the triune God" (140). The article provides a significant ecclesiology in terms of the Church as a communion in faith, love and hope (143-152), and concludes with an observation on the promise and limits of Trinitarian Ecclesiology (152-154). The projection of hierarchical relations to the Trinitarian persons could be in the eyes of the author a danger if this is pointed out as a justification of a fixed hierarchical order in the relationship between clergy and laity, and also between man and woman. Hence, he thinks rightly that we have to reaffirm the ontological equality of the Trinitarian persons to overcome the danger.

In Chapter 11 we have an interesting and relevant discussion on "Charismatic Movements, Postmodernism, and Covenantal Rationality" (157ff.). Chapter 12 contains a good treatise on Pneumatology. It highlights the positive and negative aspects of both the Reformed and Pentecostal Pneumatologies. The author Myung Yong Kim makes a good and valid point in showing the unfortunate significant error of Pentecostal pneumatology as "the misunderstanding of the so-called baptism of the Holy Spirit as something that is ... distinct from becoming a Christian"

(178). Another error is "the overestimation of speaking in tongues" (179). Chapter 19 on "Reconsidering the Doctrine of Providence" by Jan M. Lochman provides us with new insights about Divine Providence in the framework of the relationship between God's omnipotence and goodness. It includes discussions on the gospel of creation, human confusions and providence, and on theodicy (see especially 285-293). Chapter 20 by Dawn DeVries is a profound study on F. Schleiermacher and the role of the Bible in the church. This contains significant themes like the authority of Scripture, its normative character, the meaning of Inspiration, the formation of the canon, the sufficiency of Scripture, and the status of the OT in the Christian canon (298-309). Chapter 21 by G. Hunsinger is one of the longest chapters in the book. It deals with social witness in generous orthodoxy. This is a study of the new Presbyterian "Study Catechism" (311ff.). Two questions that are discussed here are: How should I treat non-Christians and people of other religions? How do you understand the uniqueness of Jesus Christ? (316). Other topics are: Justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. It also includes some discussion in favour of the full equality of women.

Chapter 23 is an interesting discussion by the Anglican theologian D. Farrow on the Reformed View of Ascension and Eucharist. He carries out this in dialogue with Aquinas, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Chardin (351-371). The readers will greatly enjoy the insightful discussion on the concept and theory of ecumenism or ecumenics in terms of unity and plurality by Ulrich H. J. Körtner in chapter 26 (398-411). W. Weinrath reflects on the Openness and Worldliness of the Church in the following chapter 27 (412- 434). The author defends the Reformed annulment of the Magisterium of the church (417-419). The positive results are, thus, according to him, the clergy and the Magisterium are placed within the congregation. There is no more special interpretative authority of the Magisterium. That there are no more spiritual ranks in the Church is also considered as a positive result. The concern that the Bible is to be the sole foundation for the orientation of the Church can be appreciated. Removing the special authority of the Magisterium, however, does not do justice to the Bible or to the very mind of Jesus Christ. Arguing for and on the full normativity of the Bible has to be done, for the sake of consistency, in accordance with the teaching of the Bible! That the scripture is "not a matter of one's own interpretation" is formally testified

by 2 Peter 1:20. Even otherwise it is clear that you need someone with authority to get the authentic interpretation of the Bible (See Acts 8:34f.). Doing away with the official instances of authority in the church has, in fact, backfired by creating chaos and the many divisions among Christians. Some kind of a ranking in authority and assignments of offices, not in personal worth or dignity, has to be there at the secular (sociological) level as well as the spiritual (ecclesiastical) level. Without such an order no society can properly function or help the members in matters of dispute or difference of opinion regarding interpretation of important matters.

The final chapter 28 is on dealing theologically with the so-called non-theological factors by Piet J. Naudé (435-449). The factors meant here are preferably termed by the author "social factors." They are the factors behind both church divisions and church union from social sources: the historical, economic, and cultural factors.

Thus, on the whole, the book contains many interesting and important discussions on the theme of ecumenism from the perspective of reformed theology. The editors and the contributors have done a real serious work. The book evokes many appreciative and critical responses as well as healthy dialogue in the spirit of ecumenism.

Sebastian Athappilly

Schuster, Shlomit C., *The Philosopher's Autobiography: A Qualitative Study*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003, pages xi + 244, ISBN: 0-275-97789-7.

Shlomit C. Schuster is a well-known practitioner of philosophical counselling, based in Jerusalem. Her earlier book, *Philosophy Practice: An Alternative to Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1999), contributed significantly to the solidification of the emergent field of philosophical counselling (also called philosophical practice). The present book is still another contribution to the field, but with a difference.

Though a philosopher's autobiography need not necessarily be a philosophical autobiography, in many an instance it is one. The philosophical autobiography is, in fact, a philosophical writing of distinct type. Schuster's work is not only a learned study of this genre but also the first book solely dedicated to the subject of philosophical autobiography.

If all philosophy is self-reflection, then it is all the more true of the philosophical autobiography. An autobiographical writing of a philosopher is a window to his or her world of philosophy and the modes of philosophising. A philosophical autobiography is for the philosopher what Schuster calls a "philosophical psychoanalysis."

The first three chapters of the book clarify the notions of philosophical autobiography and philosophical psychoanalysis. Philosophical psychoanalysis is a philosopher's attempt to understand oneself and others from a philosophical perspective. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are an in-depth study of Augustine's *Confessions*, Rousseau's *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* and Sartre's *Words*. The author has chosen Augustine, Rousseau and Sartre as case studies in philosophical psychoanalysis, because their life-narratives are particularly rich in philosophical self-understanding. They made use of philosophical self-analysis to make their lives worthwhile and to become the persons they wanted to be, contends the author. She has successfully brought out the philosophical dynamics of these philosophers' living, thinking and writing and shows how they accomplished a successful philosophical psychoanalysis. Chapter 7 is an epilogue that further substantiates the author's project, drawing on the autobiographies of J. S. Mill, S. Kierkegaard and B. Russell.

Schuster's book is marked by originality, scholarship, clarity of thought and an engaging style. The book invites its readers to a philosophical-autobiographical reading of their lives and become more self-aware in the path of making their lives worth-living. As Maurice Friedman rightly notes in the foreword, this exciting book "deserves and hopefully will find a wide readership."

Joseph Kaipayil

Sweet, William, *Religion, Science and Non-science*, The Nimishakavi K. Subbiah Naidu Endowment Lectures 1998-1999 & The Dr. S. Radhakrishnan Endowment Lectures 2001-2002, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2003, pages 98, ISBN: 81-86861-60-2.

The inception of anything new (here, science since Galileo and Darwin) should prove to be disastrous (here, science's seeming antagonism to religion). The initial and seemingly ongoing conflict is, in fact, between (1) scientific dogmas and practices that threaten to be more adequate than those of religion and (2) religious practices and definitions of beliefs that always trade antiques with respect to both the blatantly scientific mind and the deeply intellectually and practically religious soul. As this question is not scientific or religious, it can only be philosophical and epistemological, in particular. Dharmaram Publications is now ready with the second insightful, succinct, satisfying and readable form of some of Prof. William Sweet's recent reflections on religion. (The first is dealt with in William Sweet's book *Religious Belief: The Contemporary Debate*, 2003. This book was reviewed in *Journal of Dharma* 28, 2).

The "Introduction" clarifies the concepts of 'science' and 'religion', bringing in much precision to the subject matter, aim and method of science and religion, and, thus, prepares the way for the ensuing discussion in four chapters.

Chapter 1 ("Science and Religion in Conflict") studies from a wider perspective whether science and religion have, in fact, suffered the supposed divide. He shows that the alleged conflict has behind it the slim and constricted mistaking of and overstepping by each field into the other. He discusses two representative authors, Richard Dawkins (*Unweaving the Rainbow*, 1998) and Stephen Jay Gould (*Rocks of Ages*, 1995), pointing out inaccuracies in their theories of the causes of science-religion wrangle and harmony, and concludes the chapter by arguing that the presuppositions, of the view that science and religion conflict, are problematic. He appeals for more exact speculations about the nature of science and religion as a predisposition for viewing the conflict-harmony hypothesis and to create an alternative shape for the perspective.

Chapter 2 ("The Compatibility of Science and Religion") moves deeper and discusses the two positions: (1) the highly positive one that

science and religion are compatible by mutual support for development and (2) the negative one that claims them to be radically alien to or incommensurable with each other and as lacking a common keystone. In this inquiry the author does not decide between the two positions but discovers their presuppositions and analyses them in order to find what is amiss in these presuppositions – a wonderful strategy of discretion, to be expected from the mind of a philosopher, not merely from a scientist or a theologian.

For example, Sweet examines the way in which Whitehead found that the Christian belief in God's rationality must have paved the way for the growth of scientific rationality, Plantinga's and Alston's studies regarding the route through which believers acquire certain beliefs, Laplace's rejection of the religious rationality, Wittgenstein's (and Wittgensteinians') opinion about how reasons for religious beliefs are acquired in peculiar ways, etc. He opines that the attractions and the persuasiveness involved in considering religious beliefs as "entirely independent of any *external* refutation, erosion, or confirmation by science, and no statement is possible on how science affects or should affect religious belief or religious believers in general" (40), is not a worthy way of saving religion. Instead, he argues: (1) religious beliefs cannot be evidently *sui generis* or incommensurable; (2) the said approach does not recognize the empirical or descriptive aspect of belief; (3) it is vague about how to distinguish a religious belief from a metaphysical or an ideological view; and (4) it falters into fideism, since the limit of distinguishing religious beliefs from others is not set (41-43).

Chapters 1 and 2 prepare the reader to proceed well equipped to the crux of the question of the relation between science and religion, by analysing the fundamental nature of religious belief. One might, however, wonder if there is a general view of the nature of religious belief given the variety of views of science by different theorists and by different religions. So Sweet enters upon a study of the region of the multi-cultural in search of further characterizations of the question.

Chapter 3 ("Science, Religion, and Truth in a Cross-cultural Setting"), therefore, discusses the theories of religious exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, as have been defended variously by different religious representatives and thinkers in the history of religious thought. The views of John Hick, a major protagonist of the pluralist view, are

analysed at length in this chapter, and it points to where sufficiently universal rational appeal can be identified. Hick's argument that it is possible to identify a level – the deepest level – of truth in all sorts of religions, is defended, in spite of the fact that the truth of other levels of specific, culture-bound and historical beliefs may not be determinable from within or without any tradition.

Sweet points out some of his concerns about some minor details of Hick's positions, but defends the position uppermost in Hick's pluralism, i.e., that the core level of religious claims may be sufficiently and universally true, and that particular religious beliefs and the common religious core of different religions have an empirical side. Thus, he prepares the way for contrasting religious truths with scientific truths. Following this, he conclusively argues: "We can have at least some necessary conditions for determining whether religious beliefs have meaning and whether they are true. For, even if religious belief has an expressive or intentional character, it is expressive or intentional about something, it occurs in the world, and it involves a number of other (e.g., moral and empirical) beliefs and, therefore, also has a descriptive or an empirical referent" (62). Sweet, thus, finds that the multi-cultural setting of religion makes it capable of meeting with and relating to science on a relatively parallel plane. This is a fine, pleasant and agreeable conclusion, safely drawn from the facts and arguments presented.

Chapter 4 ("Evolution, Religion, and Non-science"), the Dr. Radhakrishnan Endowment Lecture at Madras Christian College, is an additional material to the volume, further elucidating the question at issue. He takes up the most fascinating cosmological and biological question of the 1980s: intelligent design (that bears affinity to creationism) vs. evolutionism. Here he discusses the science-religion relationship from the prospects of the intelligent design argument (William Dembski, Michael Behe and others). He studies the implications of the intelligent design argument that holds the absolute necessity of a designer in a partially absolutized anthropomorphic manner, and those of evolutionism that considers such a hypothesis unnecessary from the point of view of the neutral character of processes in the world.

The whole exercise in the four chapters has been concise, and the book is recommended for the perusal of anyone who would like to achieve

a fair idea of the debates in the air in the philosophy of religion – the philosopher and the layman alike.

"Making a General Point" in the context of the intelligent design argument is not out of place. We should encounter crass intellectual atheism, too, as a sort of religion that claims to submit the claims that science challenges the existence of religion and refuses to be silent unless the existence of God is "proved beyond doubt." When Sweet asserts, "science cannot prove *religious* belief" (80), what he denotes are specific beliefs like the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, etc. However, what about the possibility of ever pouring more light on the probability of there being a Divine Pole to Reality? Philosophers of the Cosmos and of God and Religion seem to shy away from grand attempts in this direction!

This will not be a criticism of the book at review, but an admission of the effects of the tremor of the so-called inadmissibility of the ancient, medieval and modern 'proofs' for the existence of God. We should dare make a passing but pertinent admission here, that today's science, philosophy and religion do not seen to possess any scientifically easily permissible causal or other theory "demonstrating" that more than mediocre truth probability is already available to present-day scientific rationality to conclude to the existence of some sort of a Divine who is not the same as what we usually understand as the world. Ever after the centuries-long shudder of the philosophically widely accepted, theologically widely dreaded failure of modern and contemporary philosophies of God and religion, to prove the 'existence' of some sort of a Divine, thinkers tend today either (1) to take for granted the existence of some sort of a God; or (2) to indulge in outright questioning of the very possibility of a God; or still further (3) to be cringingly neutral about such a possibility. The present book seems to belong to the first category. But it still looks a valid Aristotelian and Thomistic engagement, and a theological attempt must – that fulfils the intellectual dimension of religious belief – tend to pursue researches towards creating a train of causal proofs (with a contemporary cosmological appeal) that end in a non-Aristotelian-Thomistic God and universe that engage in an infinite, eternal partially differentiable but partially communicable nexus. Will it be an intellectualist and dogmatist grandiosity to expect that greater cosmological probability for the belief in the existence of the Divine Pole

may be awaiting us? May time prove if this question is of any religious, philosophical and scientific relevance!

Sure, the challenge from theoretical atheism could not have been part of the two endowment lectures that have been collected herein. It would not be possible also to treat, in this book, the postmodernist challenges to the 'foundationalist' metaphysics of belief in the Divine and to the metaphysics of belief in the more specific truths of specific religions. Why not, however, we be inspired by the discussions of this book and its divine presupposition/s, to work out philosophically and scientifically more satisfying theories after theories for pouring more light on the question of proofs for God the presupposition of all philosophies of religion and of God? Such theories would, then, be part of the riches of human thought striving for a synthesis of foundationalism and anti-foundationalism!

After all, everyone has wondered at some time in life whether there is a God. Is this wonder to be condemned to futility as a useful presupposition merely on the ground that all those who cuddle on to such hopes for the future of science and philosophy will be eternally jeered at? If not, we students of philosophy should encourage the enthusiasm some may have, for attempting such 'proofs' within the limits of human intellectual reach. This openness alone will hold the future of the philosophy of religion or philosophical theology within a less than bleak benchmark, so that religions may evolve in the intellectual grasp of the truth probability of the infinite, eternal and absolutely communicable existence of the Divine Pole, who can *personally* enter into an infinite but tangible engagement with us and the world, and have us and the world enter into personal relationship with Him! Or else, we will have to shut out God and religion from all actuality and possibility, of which is this world made! Perhaps the causal, ontological, creationist, evolutionist and intelligent design theories might converge in the face of such an all-embracing argument for the existence of the Divine, and this might be a fitting reply and a worthy alternative to both foundationalism and postmodernism!

Raphael Neelamkavil

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